



# PREVENTION TALK

## FAMILY ADDICTION - WHAT IS A CHILD TO DO?

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**Y**outh respond in a variety of ways when faced with parental substance abuse or addiction. Some rebel, while others are overly compliant. Some fail classes, while others excel.<sup>1</sup> However, children of addicted parents are at a higher risk of abusing substances because they are more likely to experience many of the risk factors discussed in the last issue of Prevention TALK.

The following are some risk factors to pay attention to and some suggestions on how to reduce these risk factors.

### **Transitions and Mobility:**

*Families with an addicted caregiver tend to move more frequently.*

To reduce this risk, ease the stress of the move by preparing the young person in advance for what to expect and try to keep some things predictable and stable. For example a favorite book, video, or toy can be a source of stability.<sup>2</sup>

### **Family History of the Problem Behavior:**

*If young people are raised in a family with a history of addiction, the risk of their developing this problem behavior increases.*

To reduce this risk or buffer them from this risk, establish healthy beliefs and clear standards for behavior. Help the young person develop strong bonds with positive role models at home, in the community, with their peers, and at school.<sup>2</sup>

### **REMEMBER:**

*"More than 28 million Americans are children of alcoholics; nearly 11 million are under the age of 18." <sup>1</sup>*

### **Parental Attitudes and Involvement in Drug Use:**

*Parents who ask their teen to get them a beer or light a cigarette for them are more likely to have a teen who abuses substances.<sup>3</sup>*

To reduce this risk, parents need to be careful not to involve their children in their own alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use.

### **Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior:**

*Young people from addicted family systems are more likely to show aggression, have temper tantrums, and exhibit antisocial behavior.<sup>2</sup>*

To reduce this risk, identify and seek help in attempting to change the behavior. Work with the school to ensure your young person is learning skills to control aggression and violent impulses. Follow up by teaching those skills at home.

### **Lack of Commitment to School:**

*Young people living with addiction in the family are more likely to have unfavorable attitudes towards learning, classmates, teachers, and authority.<sup>2</sup>*

A parent's attitude about the value of education can have a strong influence on a young person's commitment to school. Talk with your teen about what he/she is learning, show an interest, and encourage his/her active participation.

To encourage the positive development of young people share this information with your family, friends, and neighbors.

*For more information call:*

### **SOURCES:**

- 1 National Association for Children of Alcoholics. (2001). *Children of Addicted Parents: Important Facts*. Retrieved July 22, 2004 from [www.nacoa.net/pdfs/addicted/pdf](http://www.nacoa.net/pdfs/addicted/pdf).
- 2 Fisher, G.L. & Harrison, T.C. (1997). *Substance Abuse: Information for School Counselors, Social Workers, Therapists, and Counselors* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- 3 Hawkins, J.D., Catalano, R.J. (2002). Getting started – how to prevent drug use in your family. In Channing Bete (Ed.), *Guiding good choices program: Family guide*. South Deerfield, MA: Channing Bete Company, Inc.