
HeadOn: Substance Abuse Prevention for **Grades 6-8**



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HeadOn's Parent Connection

Dear Parent:

As a parent, you have a large influence on your child's behavior. Many scientific studies have shown that children who learn about the dangers of using alcohol and other drugs from their parents are much less likely to use them. You can play a key role in helping your child stay safe and drug-free. According to "Preventing Drug Use Among Children and Adolescents," a research-based guide published in 2003 by the National Institute in Drug Abuse, parents and families can serve a key protective function with their children by:

- Taking an active role in their children's lives
- Talking with them about drugs
- Monitoring their activities and getting to know their friends
- Understanding their problems and concerns
- Providing consistent rules and discipline
- Being involved in their learning and education

You can make a difference. Most research-based drug abuse prevention efforts recognize that parents, along with educators and community leaders, are essential to preventing substance use among children. Your child's school has chosen to use an innovative computer-based curriculum called *HeadOn: Substance Abuse Prevention for Grades 6-8*, to teach your child both the facts about alcohol and drugs, and the skills to help your child resist the lure of substances.

HeadOn: Substance Abuse Prevention™ for Grades 6-8 is a computer-based program built on scientific principles shown to be important in preventing drug use among adolescents. The HeadOn program has been scientifically tested and shown to be a highly effective drug abuse prevention tool. This guide describes the content and goals of this computer-based drug abuse prevention program for middle school students. By reading it, you'll understand the issues your child may face and understand important ways in which you, as a parent, can help support your child in remaining drug free.

Like you, our team is committed to helping adolescents stay drug free. If you have questions or comments about *HeadOn*, we'd love to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Prevention Science Media Team
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How can you help your child stay alcohol and drug-free?

As a parent, there are many ways you can help your child grow up substance-free. Below are several strategies you can use.

- **Recognize that your child may be exposed to drugs.** Fortunately, most adolescents do not use drugs. However, drug use occurs in a wide variety of ethnic groups, geographic locations and socioeconomic environments. Some parents mistakenly assume that their child will not be exposed to drugs. As a parent, it is important to recognize that your child may be presented with opportunities to use alcohol and drugs, and to ensure that you have done your best to help prepare them to successfully manage that situation and remain substance-free.
- **Establish clear rules and expectations.** It is important to establish clear rules and expectations about what behavior is not acceptable. When establishing rules, it is important to directly communicate your rules and expectations about not using drugs. Talk to your child about what they should do if they find themselves in a risky situation where they are exposed to drugs. Explain why the rules are important and establish clear consequences for violation of rules. Be consistent in enforcing consequences if your child violates a rule. Provide positive feedback to your child for following rules.
- **Be involved in your child's life.** Know your child's friends and their friends' parents. Be aware of the activities in which your child is engaging. Set aside time just to talk with your child every day and listen to what he or she has to say. Give your child positive reinforcement such as praise or privileges when he or she meet goals or demonstrates positive behavior.
- **Encourage your child to engage in healthy and safe activities.** Encourage your child to engage in activities they enjoy which are healthy and substance-free. This may include participation in sports, clubs, jobs, school- or community based programs. If children are spending time engaging in rewarding activities, they will have less time and likely less interest in drug-use.
- **Use this computer-based drug abuse prevention program together.** If you access the HeadOn program, you may choose to complete one or more sections of the program with your child and talk with your child about what she or he has learned from the program. You may also choose to complete one or more sections of the program on your own, so you may become more aware of effective drug abuse prevention training and the types of pressures and challenges your child may face.

What other resources are available for parents?

Many research-based drug abuse prevention materials are available to parents. You may wish to obtain one or more of these resources to learn more about various types of drugs and their effects,

as well as ways you can best support your child in remaining drug-free. Below are several resources that you may find useful.

Preventing Drug Use among Children and Adolescents, A Research-based Guide for Parents, Educators, and Community Leaders. National Institute on Drug Abuse. Available online at www.nida.nih.gov/Prevention/Prevopen.html.

Keeping Your Kids Drug-Free: A How-to Guide for Parents and Caregivers. National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, Office of National Drug Control Policy. Available online at: www.TheAntiDrug.com.

Parenting is Prevention. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. Available online at <http://parentingisprevention.samhsa.gov>.

Some Suggested Interactive Activities for Parents and Children

To reinforce the research-based content in HeadOn, it may be helpful (and fun!) to sit down with your child and work on an activity together. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Resisting Advertising - To follow-up on the advertisement module, ask your child to find advertisements and bring them to you for discussion over dinner. Together, you can try to identify as many advertising strategies as you can, using the strategies learned in HeadOn.
2. Self-Management Skills - You may ask your child how they can use the self-management techniques they learned in the program to help them in their daily life. For example, together you can brainstorm strategies they can use to reward themselves for achieving a goal, strategies they can use for managing stress, etc. You could then each develop a goal and work on self-management together.
3. Rewarding positive behavior - Set-up a system to reward some mutually agreed upon positive behavior by your child, such as completing all of their homework each night or doing their chores without being reminded. This point system could be tracked via a point chart, posted on the refrigerator or in their room. Points would be earned only if the desired behavior occurs and would be consistently earned when the desired behavior occurs. No points are given when the desired behavior does not occur. Once the child reaches his or her point goal (pre-established by parent and child together), the child earns a special privilege or reward, like going to the movies together or having a special shopping trip with Mom or Dad. The focus should be on reward activities you can share together.