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Give Your Children a Reason to Say No to Drugs

'Tis the season for football tailgates, college frat parties, homecoming celebrations and Halloween costume parties. While most parents assume that their children are safe—the scary reality is that they are being exposed to deadly and addictive substances way more than we think.

Mental health and medical experts have found that by giving your children factual information and ways to keep busy, you are arming them with the best weapon against substance abuse. Parents and caregivers have the first chance to leave an impression on their children by showing them they can have fun without getting involved with drugs and alcohol.

Parents need to talk to their children about the dangers of being around and using illegal drugs. Young adults are less likely to get involved in illegal drug use and underage drinking when they know it will disappoint their parents. Educate yourself and your children so that conversations about the reality and prevalence of drug abuse will not be the 'elephant in the room' and will be a topic you can openly discuss.

Donna Wood, practice leader for clinical operations for the consulting arm of Quorum Health Resources goes on to confirm that: The National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse VIII and The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) provide some alarming facts about drug abuse among young adults:

- In an NIDA survey, eighth-graders had the highest rates of inhalant abuse
- The average age of first use is 12 for alcohol and 13 for drugs
- 142,000 teens aged 12-17 years old are treated annually for substance abuse
- Teens are 50 percent more likely to drink, smoke, become intoxicated and use drugs out of boredom
- 44 percent of high school seniors drank alcohol in the past month
- 21 percent of high school seniors used marijuana in the past month

One of the most recent trends is teens using so-called "bath salts" to get high. These stimulants are not bath salts that go into the tub, but by marketing them as bath salts and labeling them "not for human consumption," manufacturers have been able to sell the substances legally. Experts say their effects are similar to ecstasy, PCP and cocaine. They are sold with names like Monkey Dust, Purple Rain, White Rush and Vanilla Sky." The long-term effects of using bath salts as a drug are unknown; however, the reported short-term effects include rapid heartbeat, high blood pressure, chest pain, paranoia, hallucinations and even

thoughts of suicide. Deaths associated with bath salts as a drug have also been reported. Bath salts may eventually be banned in some states and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration is studying the long-term medical effects.

While alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana are commonly abused by young adults, new trends surface all the time. Parents should be aware of warning signs to quickly spot a problem and avoid serious health risks. Look for irregular sweating, thirst, jerky body movements, grinding of teeth and generally erratic behavior.

Parents, teachers and caregivers should be aware of warning signs associated with drug use so they can take immediate precautionary action. Once you get your loved one to a medical professional; the professional will assess the circumstances and provide guidance about treatment options.

The symptoms that point to a drug emergency can vary greatly. Overdose symptoms include agitation, drowsiness, vomiting, difficulty breathing, sweating and paranoia. If you suspect someone is experiencing withdrawal or overdose, provide first aid as needed and seek immediate medical assistance. If possible, take any drug containers or remaining substances to the emergency room with you. To learn more about National Drug Facts Week and how you can facilitate a discussion in your community about the harmful effects of drugs, visit <http://drugfactsweek.drugabuse.gov/> The National Institute on Drug Abuse's website for teens is at <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/>.

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