

Protecting Your Children From Alcohol Abuse

admin · Tuesday, July 17th, 2007



We all wish there was a vaccine that would immunize our children (and ourselves for that matter) from the ravages of alcohol abuse and addiction. We'd like to stop worrying about death, DUI's, and personal disaster. But there aren't any easy fixes - or even easy answers - and the best we can hope for is to make the best choices we can out of too many conflicting choices.

For example: do you want your child to abstain from alcohol and thereby avoid even the chance of alcoholism? It's true that if she or he doesn't drink alcohol then abuse, dependence, and addiction isn't in his or her future. This may be the best decision when a documented family history of alcoholism, on both sides, exists. Of course abstaining will significantly increase their risk for heart attack, stroke, Alzheimer's, and senile dementia, among other unattractive possibilities. Choices are never obvious where alcohol is concerned.

The ideal is beyond dispute: moderation, as in all things. There aren't any surprises in the prescription, but you still can't buy moderation at the corner pharmacy. That being the case, what's a parent, school, or community to do?

For parents the recipe is simple: set a good example. The cultures with the lowest alcoholism rates are those that use alcohol respectfully, joyfully, and in moderation. They do not approve of, or model, drunkenness. Parents need to treat alcohol consumption with education, risk assessment, and understanding. It isn't a lot different than muddling through that other high risk, high benefit, parental nightmare, sex.

For schools the effective strategy is also pretty straightforward, education in the early grades followed by activities that develop competing interests in middle school and high school. Protection from

alcohol abuse has much the same form as recovering from it - develop interests that override it. Schools should also avoid so-called "drug and alcohol awareness programs" which offer no benefit to low and high-risk students and actually increase inappropriate involvement by teenagers at medium risk levels. Schools should also enforce, as well as have, zero tolerance rules that apply equally to everyone including football players, cheerleaders, and the offspring of the rich and powerful.

Communities need to support parents and schools with their own contributions towards alternative activities and disapproval of individuals and businesses that profit from, exploit, or encourage adolescent alcohol use outside the home. It's not that hard to do and the mutual support of families, schools, and communities is as close to immunization as we're ever going to get.

As parents we can absolutely control what happen in our homes and what messages we send to our children. We can also have a great deal of influence over their schools. Swaying a community is a bigger issue, but many of us can still exercise some control over where we choose to live.

The best news in all of this is that managing two out of three of your child's environments is usually going to be enough. As with the quality of your child's education, the attitude of the home and school, the home and the community, or even the school and community, can be enough to make a lifelong difference.

It still takes two of the three, and home is the only one you can absolutely guarantee. It's where attitudes start, develop, and carry over. Why not make sure that you're doing the right thing? Drink a toast to joy and moderation at the weekly family dinner. Don't forget to pour a glass for the adolescent who is looking to you for guidance, not lectures. Remember, like sex, lifelong abstinence is usually neither healthy nor to be expected. Enjoy accordingly.

<http://www.stopdrinkingadvice.org/guide/>

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