

## SIX STEP ACTION PLAN

When a parent first learns a child is using drugs, the first thing the parent will need to determine is how long the child has been using and if the child is addicted. For this, parents will need to contact a drug and alcohol counselor or mental health care professional who will be able to offer valuable referrals to self-help support groups and assistance for the entire family, making the task ahead far more manageable.

Many parents have successfully intervened in their child's drug or alcohol use by carefully following the **Six Step Action Plan** outlined below.

### **STEP 1 Tell your child how you feel**

"I love you more than you can possibly understand. Because I love you, I will do anything I have to do to keep you from destroying yourself with drugs and alcohol."

### **STEP 2 Establish the rule**

"You may not use drugs or alcohol. If you choose to break this rule the consequences will be severe."

### **STEP 3 Active Supervision**

Make it more difficult for your child to use drugs by closely supervising his/her activities. Check on your child as often as required. Stop by parties, go over to their friend's house and show up unexpectedly to insure they are sober. If necessary, search their room and clothing. Always insure that you are home and awake when they return home.

### **STEP 4 Consequences**

**Every time** your child ignores the rule and uses drugs or alcohol, consequences should be implemented. Consequences for drug and alcohol use will normally involve the removal of free time and restriction of the child's activities at home (grounding).

There are two general rules for disciplining adolescents:

- a) It is better to take away everything (TV, stereo, telephone, friends, etc.) for a short period of time than it is to take away one or two things for long periods.
- b) Shorter restrictions are more effective in changing behavior than longer restrictions (one day for minor infractions, up to no more than two weeks for serious violations such as drug and alcohol use). Longer periods of restriction in most cases make the adolescent feel as if they are on "death row." Many teens rebel, thinking that they have nothing more to lose.

*Note: In the beginning, parents should keep restriction short, three days (over a weekend) to one week, according to the age of the child. With drug and alcohol use, change will be slow and will depend upon the consistency with which the house rules are enforced coupled with the severity of the drug or alcohol problem.*

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### **STEP 5 Consistency/Follow Through**

Parents must follow through with consequences **every time** children use drugs or alcohol. Parents must remember to always follow through with the entire action plan. If the original restriction was set at one week, parents must not give in to their children by shortening the restriction and letting the child off early.

### **STEP 6 What else should I do to help insure success?**

- a) *Don't support your child's drug or alcohol use.* Without realizing it, parents sometimes "enable" their children to use drugs. For example, a mother with a 13-year-old son addicted to crack cocaine, was actually supporting her son's habit. Her son would stay away from home 3 to 5 days at a time, dealing and using crack. When his mother was gone, he would return home to take a shower, change clothes and eat before leaving again. This mother enabled her son to continue his drug use by leaving a window unlocked for him, washing his clothes, preparing his meals and placing them in the refrigerator. In this case, the child had no reason to stop using. He was doing what he wanted and even though his mother said, "No," her actions said, "It's OK to continue."
- b) *Model what you want your children to do.*  
Set a good example by not drinking daily or to excess or using illegal drugs.
- c) *Remove all alcohol/drugs from the house.*
- d) *Give you child positive strokes daily.*

Once again, we understand many parents will find it difficult to use some of the intervention techniques recommended. However, because drug addiction is a disease that for many will end in death, the health, safety and welfare of the child must be a parent's first concern. When drug use is suspected, nothing should be left to chance.

When parents have prepared themselves to confront the problem of drug or alcohol use and carefully set into motion the **Six Step Plan**, they will be well on their way to intervening in their child's substance abuse problem. Still, in some cases, parents will be fighting not only something the child wants to do, but also something the child is compelled to do. The child may well want to stop using drugs and yet not be able to stop himself.

Measure success in small steps. Even if a child drinks one or two fewer beers because they know a parent will be waiting up for them when they return home, it means the intervention process has begun. Because this change will be difficult, parents will need to find support. Family support groups recommended by a drug counselor or mental health care professional, may be crucial in winning the war.

Alternative Resources 1992