

# Parent Letter and Activities

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your teen's health class is currently learning about alcohol and drugs. We will begin by discussing the effects of the use and abuse of alcohol on the body and how the misuse and abuse of drugs can affect health. Specifically, students will learn to recognize the risks that alcohol and drug use pose to physical, mental/emotional, and social health. We will study the process of addiction to and withdrawal from alcohol and drugs, and we will look at ways to avoid substance abuse.

Some questions your teen will answer as we study these topics are: *Why do different people react differently to alcohol? What is alcoholism, and what can be done about it? In what ways do some people misuse and abuse drugs? What parts make up the nervous system? How can alcohol and drug use affect my thoughts and emotions? What are some reasons to avoid substance abuse? What alternatives are there to alcohol and drug use? Why is withdrawal from a drug so difficult?*

Alcohol is the most commonly abused drug in the country. Even though it is illegal for people under the age of 21 to drink alcohol, the average age for taking a first drink is 13. Similarly, an ongoing survey has shown a steady increase in illegal drug use among teens in recent years. Between 1991 and 1996, for example, the percentage of eighth graders who used drugs more than doubled. Given statistics such as these, it is clear that making teens aware of the risks of taking drugs and drinking alcohol should be a top priority.

To support and extend our classroom work, please set aside some time during the next few weeks to complete one or more of the following activities with your teen:

- Make yourself available to answer questions and discuss concerns your teen may have about the use of drugs and alcohol.
- Together, look through magazines for alcoholic beverage ads. Discuss what images the ads use to persuade people to drink alcoholic beverages. Discuss whether or not the images are accurate and what the ads are saying—and not saying—about the effects of alcohol.
- To help your teen learn how to say no effectively, role-play a situation in which one of you is trying to talk the other out of using drugs or alcohol. Then switch roles.
- Encourage your teen to share with you what she or he has learned about alcohol's effect on motor coordination.

Of course, feel free to engage in any other activities that you believe will encourage your teen to develop a greater understanding of the risks involved in substance abuse. Armed with such knowledge, your teen is far less likely to become involved with drugs and alcohol. Thank you for supporting our classroom work. As always, do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

Sincerely,

Health Teacher