



# Reaching Out

## Norristown Area Communities That Care for Youth

### Keeping Youth Safe & Drug Free

Fall 2008



#### Spotlight on Teen Drinking

#### What can parents do?

Numerous studies have linked underage drinking to:

- Dropping out of school
- Damage to growing brains
- Alcohol dependence
- Drinking and driving
- Unplanned and unsafe sex
- Accidental injuries
- Homicides and suicides

Many parents wonder what can be done to prevent their children from drinking. It is proven to help if you:

- Never serve alcohol to underage youth
- Connect with parents of your child's friends
- Keep track of your child's activities and whereabouts
- Establish clear "no alcohol" rules
- Set a good example by being responsible with alcohol
- Help your child build healthy friendships
- Encourage healthy alternative activities to alcohol

## Keys to Keeping Youth Safe and Drug Free

By Alissa McBride, MSW, Community Prevention Coordinator

Today's kids are faced with a large number of health and safety risks, many of which are linked to choices that they make about their own behavior.

Because parents are the number one influence on their children's behavioral choices, it is important that family expectations and guidelines are clearly expressed. When families have positive patterns of communication and a sense of family togetherness in place, youth naturally want to behave in ways that cause pride rather than disappointment.

Some parents assume that their children know their expectations without having specifically stated them; others specifically state them without discussing the reasons behind them. Neither of these strategies is very effective. Studies show that parents who are the most successful in keeping their children on the right path

discuss both their expectations and the family values that support them on a regular basis.

Youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are exposed to far more dangers than past generations. Violence has reached epidemic proportions and the sheer volume of drugs available to youth is staggering. The rules and freedoms that we were given throughout our childhoods are not sufficient in today's world. It is for this reason that parents must take the time to purpose-

fully create guidelines that support their expectations, understanding that they may change with each child and set or circumstances.

Once you have determined your family position on important issues such as homework, respect, language, chores, alcohol, drugs, and violence, you must develop a



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set of guidelines to reinforce them. If, for example, it is your expectation that your children perform well in school, you might choose to establish a guideline that no television can be watched until homework has been completed.

It is not sufficient, however, to simply set guidelines. You must monitor to see if they are being respected and then follow through with reasonable, en-

forceable and consistent consequences when they have been violated. If your consequences are



extreme, family bonds will be weakened. If they are not enforce-

able, your child will not take them seriously. If they are inconsistent, they do not provide your child with the structure they need. Therefore, it is essential that your children know what you expect, why you expect it and what will happen if they don't follow the rules.

**If kids know what their guidelines and consequences are BEFORE they face a difficult situation, it can help them make the right decisions. These guidelines and consequences serve as guardrails of protection.**

## “We’re the (your family name goes here) team!”

By Diane Vella, MA, Parent Education Coordinator

Being a member of a group, belonging, being included is a basic human need. A family provides that to children. If the family doesn't provide the team feeling, the child is at risk for gang involvement or any other type of group structure that may be negative. So how does a family create a team feeling? Keep reading...

- The family creates a team spirit by doing an activity together. For example, **“In our family, we go to church, ride bikes or cook meals together.”** The activity doesn't matter, as long it is expressed out loud among family members. Of course you have to do it, not just talk about it!

- Each member of the team (family) makes a contribution to the family functioning. For example, **everyone has chores to do.**

- Parents establish themselves as **the head of the team** (family) by establishing routines like wake up time, dinner time, study time, and bed time.



- Parents express the values they want kids to pick up. For example, **“In our family, we don't swear.” “In our team (family) we don't hit humans or animals.”**

Of course this calls the parents to do or not do what they are talking about. The “do as I say, not as I do” approach does not work.

Everyone wants to feel needed, and having chores will contribute to the family and builds the feeling of being needed and a member of a team. “My family needs me!”

It is a well-researched fact that the majority of what we communicate is through our behaviors, not our words. Be sure to put action behind your words to make sure your team feeling sticks!

# Do you have the skills?

By Jennifer Yeager, CTC Youth Services Specialist

Good communication skills do not come naturally to many of us. We know that communication includes our words and our actions, but it can be difficult to say what you need to sometimes with your children. Let's look at how to do this in more detail.

## Communicate effectively through your actions:

- **Practice what you preach**  
If you tell your child to be respectful to people, what do they learn when they watch your actions? Do they see you treating others with respect?
- **Watch their body language**  
Look for signs of understanding when you're speaking to them. Be aware of eye contact and arm positions. A person's body language sends clues to how the conversation is going.
- **Listen to your child**  
Turn off the TV, sit down, look your child in the eye, and hear them out.
- **Set realistic expectations**  
Look for things you truly have control over.
- **Show interest in them**  
Go to their games and parent-teacher conferences. Spend time doing things they enjoy.



- **Help them when needed**  
Whether it's teaching them to tie their shoes, homework help, or assisting them in researching colleges, your child does need you.
- **Set and enforce realistic consequences for bad behavior**  
When you choose a consequence that fits the crime and follow through by enforcing it you communicate love and trust worthiness.

## How to communicate effectively through your words

- **Separate who they are from how they are**  
All children misbehave. When we discipline it is important to our children's self-worth that we tell them that they made a bad choice, not that they are bad kids.

- **Praise their efforts**  
Let them "overhear" you bragging to another adult about how well they did their chores and such.
- **Ask your child's opinion**  
Maybe this weekend they get to pick the movie for your family time together. If you let them make small decisions and can live with the outcomes, then there are less power struggles over bigger decisions.

- **Use "I messages"**  
For example, "*I feel (feeling) when (this happens or event) because (why).*" Communicating like this takes practice, but it shows that you are taking responsibility for your feelings and keeps your child from feeling attacked.

- **Focus on strengths**  
Praise your child much more than you correct them. Find several things each day that you can compliment them on. This helps them know you're on their side.

As parents we all want close relationships with our children as well to raise responsible, happy kids. Practicing good communication skills is an important step in achieving this goal.

**Who can find the time to keep up with their kids lives?**

**[www.FindYour25thHour.org](http://www.FindYour25thHour.org)**



KEEPING YOUTH  
SAFE  
&  
DRUG FREE

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**Communities That Care (CTC)** is a risk-focused approach to reducing adolescent problem behaviors through community mobilization and planning. Local citizens and community leaders work together to identify the risk factors that increase the likelihood of problem behaviors developing, and enhance the protective factors that can shield youngsters from problems. The risk and protective factors are used to implement a comprehensive plan to step ahead of the problems with far-reaching and long-lasting solutions.

For more information, visit our website at [www.norristownctc.org](http://www.norristownctc.org).

## Assertiveness 101

By Rob Dallas, CTC Youth Services Specialist

Teaching our children to be assertive is one of the most important roles we have as parents. Being assertive is having the ability to stand up for ourselves and the way we feel, without being offensive. Being assertive is very similar to being aggressive, but without being threatening or offensive to other people.

The ability to be assertive stems from having good manners. Someone who is assertive must have the ability to approach a subject, while being thoughtful of the other person's feelings. People are so quick to start fights and act out violently in this day and age. Teaching our kids to act assertively will give

them the power to work out their problems in a more adult-like fashion. Instead of resorting to violence they can rely on talking and working problems maturely.



The best way to teach our children to be assertive is to be there for them to guide them as

they have to face situations in their life. Make sure your child knows that having the power to be assertive is having the ability to deliver their message.

- Speak in a firm manner. Not too loud, not too quiet, but firm.
- When speaking, speak slow and clear without any hesitation.
- Look the person directly in the eyes while speaking.
- Be sure that you are not talking to the person from a distance, but also make sure you are not up in the person's face.

If we are there for them as parents and help to form their ability to stand up for themselves now, it will help get them started on the right foot for their future.