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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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## Know! Focus on Positive Prevention Strategies

*"14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.[a] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." Romans 7:14-20*

As a parent or other caring adult, when we look to prevent or change particular behaviors in children, we sometimes do so by attempting to instill fear (scare tactics). When it comes to anti-substance use scare tactics, messages delivered may go something like this:

- See that mock crash, if you drink and drive, you will crash and you will die.
- Were you listening to the story that family told about their child's drug overdose? If you take those pills, you will end up the same way as that child.
- Look at those awful pictures of meth users. That is what happens when people use meth.
- It is amazing that man is even alive to testify after his long and dreadful ordeal with drugs.

The above statements are true. Drinking and driving causes deaths. Taking drugs, whether in pill form or otherwise, causes overdoses. Meth users do have a distinctive appearance from long periods of heavy use. Hearing a former drug user tell his/her story of hitting rock bottom, then bouncing back in life, stirs emotions and inspires. While such tactics certainly work to get most children's attention, frighten them and evoke fear, the bigger question is, does it work to prevent or change behavior?

Prevention experts say "no," and here's why:

1. **Youth are hardwired to defend against negative messaging:** When the outcome doesn't always match the message being delivered to them, they may discount it. "My friend took those same pills to get high many times and he's just fine," or, "I know a girl who uses meth and she doesn't look like those people."
2. **Young people filter information differently than adults:** Most adults filter information using logic and rational thinking. Most teens, on the other hand, are naturally driven to engage in riskier, more impulsive behavior. Blame it partially on the adolescent brain, specifically the prefrontal cortex, which is the area of the brain responsible for controlling impulses, exercising judgment and decision-making; it is not fully developed until a person's mid-twenties.



Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free



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- 3. **High-risk youth can be more attracted to risky behavior:** Some youth are wired more strongly for sensation-seeking and are more impulsive risk-takers. Present such a youth with the chance to rebel by getting drunk or high and he/she may see it as thrill-seeking opportunity. The better approach here is to deliver a positive message about non-use, so as not to give a child something to rebel against.
- 4. **Strong warnings can send unintended messages:** Overwhelming negative attention focused on anti-use may unintentionally send the message to children that it is a widespread problem and everyone must be doing it. Such misinterpretation leads to youth believing alcohol and drug use is the norm, that their peers are using, and that peers would be accepting of their choice to use.

**POSITIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES:** When it comes to preventing alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, you are encouraged to focus efforts on teaching children what TO do, instead of what NOT to do, and reminding them regularly that the majority of youth do not use. Research shows that parents and other caring adults can have the greatest impact on young lives by guiding them to make positive decisions, showing them healthy ways to cope, teaching them important resistance skills, and then giving them the opportunity to practice what they've learned.

For more information on Positive Prevention Programs, contact Drug Free Action Alliance at 614-540-9985 or visit [www.drugfreeactionalliance.org](http://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org).

Sources: [Why Scare Tactics in Drug Prevention Messaging Don't Work](#). Drug Free Action Alliance, 2013.

Other Verses to Consider:

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

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