

Parental monitoring and its impact on alcohol and other drug use

Although parents sometimes doubt their importance, they can play a significant role in preventing, or at the very least, delaying adolescent alcohol and other drug use. There are two main protective factors that are supported by research evidence and they are as follows:

- **parenting style**
- **parental monitoring**

When parents are aware of a range of aspects of their child's life —what they are doing, who they are with, and where they are, we say these they are monitoring their child.

As well as knowing what their teens are doing, parental monitoring includes:

- **the expectations parents have regarding their teen's behaviour** – what rules are being made?
- **the actions parents take to keep track of their teen** – how are the rules being enforced, i.e., how do you know that the rules are not being broken?
- **the ways parents respond when their teen breaks the rules** – what are the consequences and are they being enforced?

Monitoring should be age-appropriate and change as the child gets older to match their stage of development. Appropriate levels of behavioural control need to be applied in an environment that supports trusting and non-intrusive parent-child communication. This encourages disclosure by the child, thus ensuring that parents are able to access accurate monitoring information.

Although parents sometimes doubt their importance, particularly during the teenage years, research indicates that parents play an important part in the development of their adolescent children. As such, parents can play a significant role in preventing, or at the very least, delaying adolescent alcohol and other drug use.

Research indicates that parents can protect against adolescent substance use where parenting skills, parent-adolescent communication and levels of warmth and affection are high. Attachment to the family and low parental conflict are also considered to be protective factors that may contribute to teens choosing not to use drugs.

There are two main protective factors, however, that are supported by research evidence and they are as follows:

- **parenting style**
- **parental monitoring**

For information on parenting style, please see the fact sheet 'Parenting style and its impact on alcohol and other drug use'.

Parental monitoring

When parents are aware of a range of aspects of their child's life —what they are doing, who they are with, and where they are, we say they are **monitoring** their child.

As well as knowing what their teens are doing, parental monitoring includes:

- **the expectations parents have regarding their teen's behaviour** – what rules are being made?
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- **the ways parents respond when their teen breaks the rules** – what are the consequences and are they being enforced?

Adolescents whose parents use effective monitoring practices are less likely to make decisions that can negatively impact a wide range of health behaviours, such as having sex at an early age, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and being physically aggressive or skipping school. The effect of this supervision has been found to persist as the young people age and has been found to be effective in both single and two-parent households. Research suggests that the protective effect of such monitoring is more noticeable in girls than in boys.

Studies have also found that parental monitoring not only can prevent drug use, but can also reduce drug use in some cases. Put simply, the greater the perceived parental control, the lower the adolescent's substance use.

Unfortunately, as children develop into teenagers, parents often view them as more independent and less in need of monitoring. At the same time, adolescents may not be willing to share as much information as they once did and there is often increasing conflict as the relationship between parent and child changes. But consistent monitoring throughout the teen years is critical as teens' desire for independence increases the likelihood of risky behaviour. Studies confirm that parents and the

family remain important through this time, although their role often changes to a less directive way of parental monitoring.

Parental monitoring not only directly decreases the likelihood of substance use, it can also affect a child's friendship choices. Research has shown that teens who perceive that their parents provide substantial support are less likely to have with friends who use drugs, and those who do have friends who use drugs are less likely to start using drugs themselves.

A crucial element of monitoring is 'parental knowledge'. Parental knowledge represents what the parent actually knows versus what information parents are trying to get. Monitoring represents the seeking of information, while knowledge deals with the possession of the information. That is, asking a child where they are going and who they will be with may not actually result in accurate information and, as such, parents are encouraged to do more than simply access information from their child.

Monitoring needs to be age-appropriate and change over the course of the child's life to match their stage of development. Appropriate levels of behavioural control need to be applied in an environment that supports trusting and non-intrusive parent-child communication. This encourages disclosure by the child, thus ensuring that parents are able to access accurate monitoring information.