

The eReview provides analysis on public policy relating to Canadian families and marriage. Below please find information on the role parents have in effective substance use prevention and treatment.

Parents and preventing teen drug abuse

Effective drug abuse prevention starts at home

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Good news for Canadian parents and youth workers: Two recent studies report teen drug use is slowly declining in Ontario and New Brunswick. [1] Good news, but parents need to remain ever vigilant about drugs and their kids. Parents of pre-teens and teens are well positioned to help their children understand the risks associated with substance abuse, especially when the right tools are available. In short, parents are an important tool in combating teen drug abuse.

One of the most effective measures of prevention is strong parent-child relationships. Community based programs like *How to Drug Proof Your Kids™* focus on helping parents assess and develop their relationship with their children while providing a primer on substance abuse. [2]

This prevention based program teaches parents how to intervene and help children when they suspect the presence of a drug problem. Initiating early conversations with children about drug and alcohol use is an effective preventative measure. The course encourages parents to consider how their own behaviours and attitudes toward substance use influences their children. [3]



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Parent-child relationship is critical

The parent-child relationship is all the more critical when one considers some of the substances teens abuse can be found right at home in the liquor or medicine cabinet. The same study in Ontario that showed a decline in drug abuse also reported that 31 per cent of 7th graders began abusing alcohol by grade six. [4] The same survey found that 21 per cent of students used a prescription opioid pain reliever such as Percocet, Percodan or Tylenol-3 for non-medical purposes within the last year. While the use of many street drugs declined in Ontario over the last few years, the misuse of the highly addictive painkiller OxyContin has become more popular with Ontario students. [5] Another trend parents should be aware of is the misuse of Dextromethorphan found in many over-the-counter cough medicines.

Still, dedicated parents may do all the right things and experience heartache when children make poor choices. Parents need to continue to engage young people in conversation, setting agreed boundaries and consequences for which young people take responsibility. [6] When young people become drug dependent it may be necessary to assist them in recognizing their dependency. There are many types of treatment approaches beginning with visiting a family doctor to day treatment or residential rehabilitation.

Finding the right treatment program can be difficult for parents. Even with the slow decline in drug abuse in New Brunswick, youth treatment centres there remain busy, often filled to capacity. [7] Families in crisis can find it challenging to locate nearby treatment centres for minors and cost and limited spaces at centres can pose additional burdens on families. [8] The National Anti-Drug Strategy released earlier this fall promised an additional \$32.2 million slated for treatment. [9] Investing in youth treatment programs would provide parents and teens with greater accessibility to quality treatment options.

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Measures of last resort

Another measure of last resort being tried in several provinces includes legislation. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta passed legislation in 2006 giving parents legal rights to send children aged 12 to 17 to stabilization programs against their will. The plan has not been without controversy as some argue that the legislation infringes on personal rights while others argue the legislation is not aggressive enough. [10] The legislation in all three jurisdictions share the following elements:

- It sets criteria that qualify a youth for court ordered stabilization.
- At least one doctor or addiction specialist must evaluate the young person for stabilization to proceed.
- The stabilization treatment spans five to seven days at a centre or community based program.
- The youth has access to a legal aid lawyer who can assist them in appealing the process should they choose.

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission released an evaluation of the Alberta-based program suggesting it has been successful. Of the 618 youth admitted from July 1, 2006 to August 31, 2007, about half have voluntarily sought further treatment after discharge, most frequently in the form of counselling. [11] The evaluation suggests that 85 per cent of youth would recommend the program to friends in a similar situation, leaving the majority of parents satisfied with the process. [12] The program has reportedly had a positive affect on many families as more than half of the youth reported having an improved relationship with their family one month after discharge. [13] These provincial legislative initiatives are still new and will benefit from further refinement and evaluation. However, it's fair to say positive effects have been credited to this legislation as a measure of last resort.

Parents are the first line of defence in youth substance abuse prevention. Parental attitudes and initiatives are essential elements in preventing or helping young people with substance abuse problems. By supporting youth treatment options, governments can provide parents with the tools to help their children.

- [1] Adlaf, E.M., Paglia-Boak, A. (2007) Drug use among Ontario students 1977-2007. CAMH research document series no. 20. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, retrieved November 21, 2007 from http://www.camh.net/Research/Areas_of_research/Population_Life_Course_Studies/OSDUS/OSDUHS2007_DrugDetailed_final.pdf
- Balram, B.C. et al (2007) New Brunswick student drug use survey highlights. New Brunswick Department of Health. Retrieved November 30, 2007 from <http://www.qnb.ca/0378/pdf/SDUS-2007-e.pdf>
- [2] See How to Drug Proof Your Kids <http://www.drugproofyourkids.ca/>
- [3] Personal communication with K. Prediger Program Manager DPYK November 28, 2007.
- [4] Adlaf and Paglia-Boak, p.vii.
- [5] Ibid., vi.
- [6] How to drug proof your kids; parent notes (2001) 4th ed. Vancouver: Focus on the Family Canada, pp. 84-87.
- [7] Moszynski, M. (2007, Nov.21) Student drug, alcohol use drops; however, youth treatment centre still at capacity. Times and Transcript (Moncton), A3.
- [8] Personal communication with K. Prediger Program Manager DPYK November 28, 2007
- [9] See A Safer Canada: Building A stronger Canada in a Modern World. *Budget 2007*. Retrieved July 12, 2007 from <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2007/bp/bpc6e.html>
- [10] Alberta bill allows parents force kids into detox (2005, April 17) CTV.ca retrieved December 4, 2007 from http://www.canadiancrc.com/articles/CTV_Alberta_parents_force_kids_detox_17APR05.aspx
- [11] Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (2007) Evaluation of the services under the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act: Summary report. Edmonton, p. 23. retrieved December 3, 2007 from <http://www.aadac.com/documents/PChADSumReport-electronic.pdf>
- [12] Ibid., 24.
- [13] Ibid., 23.

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