

Suggested title: Building bonds can help kids steer clear of alcohol and drugs

When it comes to your child's health you place a priority on prevention, making sure they eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep and brush their teeth. When it comes to helping them stay alcohol and drug free, prevention is just as critical.

A strong family bond is one of the most important factors that can protect kids from alcohol and other drug use. Here are a few suggestions to help build closeness and trust – even through everyday activities:

- Spend time doing fun things as a family, like cooking and eating dinner together, playing board games, watching a movie, shooting baskets or going to community events.
- Take advantage of everyday moments, like riding in the car or getting your kids ready for bed, to tell them you love them and to share your values and expectations. Children may not always admit it to their mom and dad, but parent influence is the biggest factor in their decision about whether or not to use alcohol and other drugs.
- Make it an ongoing conversation. Talking with your child – early and often – about the harms of substance use and establishing strong family rules against it is critical.
- Your child may have opinions, fears and concerns about substance use. Educating yourself about the harms of alcohol and other drugs can ensure the information you share with your child is accurate and credible. Listening to their perspectives helps reinforce family bonds.
- Remember that parenting doesn't have to be done in isolation. Consider spending time with the parents of your child's friends. Meet at a coffee shop or park. You'll find other parents share many of the same concerns and challenges about raising kids. Together, you can establish standards of behavior, explore ways to build your parenting skills through classes and seminars, and become an even better parent.

Organizations such as Oregon Partnership, a nonprofit that provides substance abuse prevention education and treatment referral, offer a host of parent resources. Visit its Web site at www.orpartnership.org to find out more.