

Resilience is developed within a person by their personal (a child's own genetic makeup and temperament) – as well as family characteristics, and their environmental consequences. It is important for this reason that no parent leave their child's well being and drug education entirely up to someone else, because it is within the home and family structure that children first develop their attitudes and values for use in later life.

Children faring best against negative experience and developing into healthy productive adults are those who possess social competency (ability to establish and maintain positive relationships), problem solving skills (ability to plan and seek help when required), autonomy (ability to maintain their identity), and a sense of purpose in their future. Each of these four factors can be greatly contributed to by the initiation and continuation of positive parenting techniques during children's early life.

If you wish to develop drug resilience within your child, you should begin by asking them what they have already learnt about drugs, and then continue by correcting any misunderstanding, expanding and introducing new topics. Make sure that the information you offer is also suitable for your child's age and stage in life.

Teens who have learnt a lot about the risks of drugs from their parents are up to 50% less likely to try drugs than those who learnt nothing at home. For this reason, it is important that parents encourage open dialogue with children about their experiences, and ensure that an understanding exists with children so that any questions they wish to ask will not be rejected, but instead answered with honesty.

Likewise, children who have broad interests and pursue activities out of school, such as sport, are also less likely to take up drugs. For this to be effective, it is important that you plan and introduce interesting activities to children whilst they are still young, and then be your kid's greatest fan. Compliment them on their achievements, efforts, strength of character and their individuality.

Getting involved and staying involved is the key to building resilience. Successfully solving problems with your teenager means giving them the room to make mistakes, in a supportive and loving environment. This does not mean you have to accept behaviour that you find intolerable, but it does mean remembering to say that it is the behaviour, not the actual child, that you don't like. At the same time you must ask yourself, is the child's behaviour the problem, or is their behaviour a symptom of a deeper problem? If this is the case, then the problem and not the symptom must be handled.

Signs of drug use

How do I know if my child is using drugs?

This is one of the most common questions asked by parents. The answer however is not simple.

It has been suggested that common tell tale signs include silence, anger towards others, changes in mood, a more than usual lack of cooperation and rudeness, a drop in school work, a change in friends or physical appearance. But these guidelines and signals can at times be unrealistic. Many of the often-quoted signs of drug use – like red eyes – could just as easily be signs of the flu. Sudden changes in behaviour and mood are also quite common in adolescence.

It should also be made clear that sometimes the effects of drugs may not be present because they may have worn off before you have the opportunity to notice - thus leading to a false sense of security.

The only true way to tell if any of these signs are indeed true signals of drug use would be to know your child well and know what is happening in their lives. The more you know about your children's lives and their concerns, the easier it will be for you to pick up on any developing or existing problems. But it is just as important, if not more so, not to panic or continuously intervene in children's privacy as this will most likely lead to mistrust, anxiety and fear.

Resources

Australian Greek Welfare Society -7 Union St. Brunswick Vic.

Evan Sycamias - Email: evans@agws.com.au

Phone: 9388 9998

A bi-lingual drug and alcohol service for the Victorian Greek community. Specialising in education and prevention.

Family Drug Help

Phone: 1300 660 068

24 hour help line for families and individuals affected by drugs. Other services include family workshops and conflict resolution.

Buoyancy Foundation

293 Punt Rd, Richmond Vic

Phone: 9429 3322

Services include: Counselling, outreach, and support groups for those affected by another's drug use.

Parent Line

Phone: 13 22 89

Assistance provided to parents or carers who are concerned about their children and drug use. Operating hours 8 a.m. to 12 a.m. Interpreting services provided.



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Positive Parenting for Young Greek families



Australian Greek Welfare Society

Parents underestimate their children's exposure to illegal drugs

Within Australian society today it is very difficult to turn to any form of popular media, including newspapers, magazines and even television news without seeing a story relating to drug abuse. There can be no doubt that drugs and alcohol have become a serious problem within Australia - a problem that our young people are becoming less exempt from everyday.

Why do kids use drugs?

There is no one unique reason why adults use drugs, nor is there one for children.

In general, drugs are taken regardless of age for several reasons, ranging from experimentation, right through to the relief of emotional or personal problems. Children also face the additional reasons of imitating others, defiance of authority and peer group pressure.

Fortunately, peace of mind can be drawn from the knowledge that of those facing problems with their life, only a small proportion turn to drugs. Of those who do, most will only experiment, motivated mainly by curiosity, aroused by a period in life where questioning and testing the environment is normal. It is not often that addiction comes about as a direct result of accidental or experimental exposure to drugs.

It is only when drugs are used to control bigger problems, such as not fitting in at school, that the drug experience (which serves as a blindfold to the frightening environment) can become an issue.

How can I help?

We all want to help our children, but often we just don't know how. Watching them make mistakes can be a truly agonising experience. The hardest thing for many parents to accept is that teenagers do experiment and could well do so with illicit substances, particularly when considering that Australia has become a drug-using society.

Even though removing the possibility of drug experimentation is almost impossible, a lot can be done to reduce the risks and lessen the chances of children developing such problems.

Ultimately, it is our attitude as parents and guardians, as well as the family environment that predominantly shapes children's early life and behaviour. It is at this stage that children learn from their immediate families, mimicking both good and bad habits. For instance, if you are a smoker, the chances are three times higher that your children will develop into smokers with

time. For this reason it is important to set good standards, encourage responsibility, spend quality time together, praise them when they do well, build their confidence when they find the going tough – and above all else, show them trust.

It should be noted though that during children's teenage years, no matter how strong the foundations of your past relations, you will most likely find yourself being challenged, particularly in relation to your ideals. This is a common issue when children begin attempting to define their own values, beliefs and relationships as young adults. This is indeed a very trying - not to mention frustrating period for both parties.

The best way to deal with such situations is to be level headed, non-confrontational, and simply make yourself available to listen when they are ready to talk. Listening shows that you care.

Try and keep discussions friendly and honest, as conversations should be between two people who respect and care for one another. Listen with your eyes, your body and your heart. Being a good listener means hearing what your kids are saying from their own perspective, not yours. Avoid interpreting. Avoid evaluating. Avoid judging.

Listening is a way of helping validate the importance of other people's thoughts, feelings and opinions – as well as developing an increased probability of having a good mutual exchange. Furthermore, a good listener will evaluate their own performance – how they sound, what they say and their actions. Actions and facial expressions often communicate more than words, and rejection may be present even when verbally communicating acceptance.

A teenager who is communicating well with parents, and is given the chance to overcome difficulties themselves will stand a better chance of coping with life than the teenager who is overly protected, or the teenager who is left to drift without any guidance. Because adolescence is such a confusing time, teenagers do look for some limits and stability. Kids may react rebelliously to limits, but if you give up control around them, you won't be an effective guide in difficult times. By letting go, you will be leaving them afloat in their own confusion. This is a level of freedom most teenagers will not welcome - despite outward appearances.

Parents who do well are those who communicate and listen well, who give choices, not just orders. Unfortunately at the end of it all, we must remember that even though parents do play a major factor in a child's early development of mind,

they are not, nor will they ever be the sole influence that shapes their lives – particularly as they grow older and experience the world.

The best a parent can ever do is simply to be there and help their children in their development, whilst being open to talking and guiding them as they need it.

If at any stage you begin to worry about your child's behaviour it will be much easier to understand them and have your questions answered if you have already established avenues for communication. Begin by letting your teenagers know what you want to talk about, and why. Lay your cards on the table and tell them if you are worried, scared or even angry. Be honest about how it feels to be a parent. If your children notice your honesty, they will most likely respond in honesty too.

Remember; don't just cover up drug problems. There is nothing wrong with seeking professional help – that's what it is there for – and the sooner help is sought the better, as the longer you avoid the issue, the worse it gets.

Talking about drugs

Raising the topic of drugs can be challenging and parents need to be prepared. Before you discuss this topic with your child, clarify your concerns. For example, are you concerned about the health risks associated with drug use, the fact that some drugs are illegal, or the fear that drug use will lead to other risky behaviour? In order to do this, it is best you begin by firstly informing yourself about drugs and other sensitive issues.

Becoming informed will not only increase your own understanding, but may also increase your level of confidence in discussing the issues with your child.

It should be noted that uninformed, exaggerated stories or myths about drug use might adversely damage the trust you are trying to develop in the relationship.

If you discover that your child is using illicit substances, the main thing that you can do is to think about why your teenager may want to use drugs, talk with them about it and seek solutions, with outside help if necessary.

Resilience and drug use

The term resilience describes the ability or strength of an individual to block or control the effects of negative experience within their life, and be strengthened by adversities.