

Teens and Smoking: What Parents Can Do

Do you expect your children to avoid smoking cigarettes? Have you talked with them about it? Even though the number of teenage smokers has been declining since the 1980's, teen smoking is still a major problem. Consider the following:

- Over 4 million children ages 12 to 17 in the United States smoked a cigarette at least once during the previous month. About a third of them will smoke at least once a day by the time they graduate from high school.
- Approximately 18 percent of all U.S. middle school and high school students currently smoke cigarettes. Another 15 percent use some other form of tobacco.

How to Help Your Child Reject Cigarettes

- **Set a good example.** Did you know that children who live with smokers are two to three times more likely to smoke when they become teenagers? If you smoke, one of the best reasons to stop is the future of your children.
- **Be honest with your children.** Talk about your experience with tobacco — including your mistakes. This may encourage your children to be more open and honest with you.
- **Establish and enforce clear rules about smoking in your home.** Tell your children how disappointed you'll be if you find out they're smoking. If you find out your child is smoking, use the opportunity to discuss your feelings rather than overreacting and taking away privileges. Your child may take your concerns more seriously if you use this approach.
- **Get to know your children's friends and their parents.** Find out if they smoke. Children of parents who smoke usually have easier access to cigarettes. Teenagers often smoke their first cigarette with a friend who already smokes.
- **Make sure your children know that tobacco is addictive.** It only takes a short time for smokers to become addicted to the nicotine in tobacco. Evidence shows that people who start smoking as adolescents are more likely to become dependent on nicotine than those who begin smoking as adults. Signs of addiction include craving cigarettes and feeling nervous when a cigarette isn't available. Quitting can be difficult and can take several attempts.
- **Teach your children about the negative health effects of tobacco.** Cigarette smoke contains more than 400 toxic chemicals, including cyanide, formaldehyde, carbon monoxide and benzene. Smokers are more than 10 times likely to die of lung cancer than are nonsmokers. Smoking also doubles the risk of heart disease.
- **Help your children cope with peer pressure.** Engage their imagination. For example, ask your children to describe a scenario — real or imaginary — in which their peers pressure them to smoke a cigarette. Rehearse how they can handle this situation.
- **Teach your children about tobacco advertising.** Make it clear that the active lifestyles portrayed in many cigarette advertisements are actually more true of nonsmokers.

- **Note the social repercussions.** Smoking is no longer socially acceptable. People who smoke often have bad breath and stained teeth, and their hair and clothing smell smoky. Smoking causes wrinkles and accelerates the aging process of your skin. Smoking often causes a chronic cough.

- **Get active in your children's school and the community.** Being involved in your children's lives is the most important step you can take toward helping them stay smoke-free. Keep your children active and involved in positive activities, such as volunteer work, music, dance and physical fitness.

Quit Smoking Group for Students

The San Jose Unified School District offers a free smoking cessation program for students voluntarily wanting to quit smoking. Group classes are held on campus either before or after school. If your child is interested, please contact Julie Bennett, the District Tobacco Education Coordinator at 535-6608 for more information.

Free Resources for Adults Quitting Smoking

No matter how old you are, or how long you've been a smoker, you can improve your breathing and cut your risk of cancer, heart disease and stroke by quitting now. Stop smoking attempts are most successful with a combination of counseling, medication and social support.

The County of Santa Clara Tobacco Prevention & Education Program offers free smoking cessation classes to all Santa Clara County residents. Classes are available in English, Spanish, and Cambodian. For information please call 408-874-5032 (English) or 408-494-1521 (Spanish). You can also call the California Smoker's Helpline for a free telephone consultation: 1-800-NO-BUTTS (English), 1-800-45-NO-FUME (Spanish), 1-800-778-8440 (Vietnamese), 1-800-400-0866 (Chinese).

Tobacco Health Advisory Committee

We're looking for parents interested in participating on our San Jose Unified Tobacco Health Advisory Committee in order to help us provide better tobacco education services to our students. The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, February 15 at 4:00 p.m. at the District Office at 855 Lenzen Ave., Room 337. If you're interested, please RSVP via e-mail with your confirmation of attendance to Julie_Bennett@sjusd.org.