

## Educating mum and dad about drug issues

How does parent education work?

### Introduction

This is an exciting time to be a young person in Australia, and there is a lot to look forward to when you are in your teens. But even in these modern times, growing up can be difficult—for both you and your parents. As a teenager you will face some issues around alcohol and other drugs that may not be easy for you or your parents to communicate about.

This fact sheet offers some information to help you communicate with your parents about alcohol and other drugs, and explains how parent education programs can help families to work through the issues that confront them.

### Young people's concerns

All young people face similar concerns, but today's teenagers also face some unique challenges. For example, most of us have school pressures or money pressures; we are all concerned about how we look, our sexuality and being part of a group; and we may feel insecure about the future. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are the added pressures of:

- HIV/AIDS risks
- concern about body image
- media influences
- gangs and violence
- alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs, such as marijuana, ecstasy and other drugs.

Any and all of these concerns and pressures can cause you to stop communicating with your parents and family. You may feel stressed, embarrassed or even angry about personal or other issues. You may be afraid to talk openly with your parents, afraid that their response might be to lecture, criticise or even punish you. In addition, you may not be able to understand your parents' concerns.

### What's the problem, parents?

Most people find being a parent or caregiver to a teenager both rewarding and challenging. However, just as the teenage years can be a confusing time for you, it can also be a confusing time for your parents. They may see a change in you that causes concern. Many things in life and society would have changed since they were a teenager, and they may not be familiar with today's youth culture or the things that are important to you now as you are growing up. For example, the fashions are different, the music is different and there are lots of cool things around now that did not even exist 20 years ago (like PC games).

### What can be done?

There are many ways that your parents and family can support you through the difficult issues you face as you develop into an adult. The first and most important support they can

offer you is to have open communication. All of the issues mentioned earlier are tough, and they are tough topics to have a conversation about, especially within a family. However, it is important for both you and your parents to connect and to feel trust so that you are able to approach your parents for information, discussion and help with problem solving when you need the support.

And because parents are not born with the knowledge and skills to help you grow up wisely, it is important for your parents also to feel that there is somewhere they can go to for information, help and problem solving. This is where parent education comes in.

### What is parent education?

Parent education provides information and skills to support healthy family development. Some parent education programs have general aims, such as teaching parents skills to ensure the healthy development of their children. Other programs help parents through their children's specific life stages, such as puberty or the teen years, or help them understand the issues that face their young people, such as alcohol or other drug use.

### Does it work?

Research shows that well-structured parent education programs can make an important difference in helping parents prepare for their children's adolescence—developing parents' awareness of the unique needs young people have when they reach their teens, and providing them with important information such as about drugs and drug use.

### How does it work?

Most parent education programs are designed so that parents can take a lead role in developing their own skills and knowledge. With the help of a facilitator, parents meet as part of a group, collaborating with other parents who have the same concerns. Parents are encouraged to discuss and practice strategies to enhance their parenting skills and experiences over the course of the program.

Many parent education programs are run through schools. The advantage of this is that the school is able to make sure that parents have the same information and understanding about issues that are being taught at school.

So a parent drug education program can be an important part of the school's overall drug education program. For example, a classroom discussion on drugs between teacher and students can be continued between the young people and their parents at home. One advantage is that the young person can get the facts about drugs and drug use, and they can feel supported in their learning both at school and at home. Another is that their parents can feel reassured that their children understand the issues involved and are able to discuss openly the issues that concern them.

Most people have their own ideas about what makes a good parent, but not all parents are the same, and not all young people are the same. Parent education can help parents and their children work out the most effective approach, to suit their family's changing needs over time.

**For information on drugs and drug prevention, or to access our other fact sheets and reports, visit our website or contact the DrugInfo Clearinghouse Resource Centre on tel. 1300 85 85 84.**