Teenagers, Drugs & Alcohol

On Tuesday night we were very fortunate to hear Paul Dillon’s presentation on “Teenagers, Drugs & Alcohol”. Paul is a recognised authority on this subject with over 25 years experience. He stressed the importance of us working together as a community to ‘combat’ the issue of alcohol and other drugs and their impact on our children.

The key points/advice from the presentation were:

1) Start speaking to your children about alcohol and other drugs from a very early age in a way that’s neither threatening nor lecturing. It’s never too early to start – children pick up so much information on this topic simply by watching your drinking patterns. Stress the main concern with alcohol use, in particular, is that it makes you vulnerable and that in itself is where a lot of the danger lies. Also, discuss with them the health issues involved (eg the serious damage caused to young lives, that are still developing, from alcohol absorption).

2) All teenagers want to ‘feel part of the big group’ and to be seen to be doing what everyone else is doing. Make sure they know that the media focuses on the bad news and that NOT all teenagers are drinking and using drugs. The fact is, in this country, many of our school-based young people are not drinking to excess or taking drugs. According to the 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 92% of 14-19 year olds AREN’T drinking at risky or high risk levels! Encourage your kids to ‘fit in’ to this 92% band.

3) REMEMBER serving/providing alcohol to under 18s is illegal in NSW and you can be prosecuted. You wouldn’t hand your 15 year old your car keys and ask them to go up the shop and get you some milk because
   a) it’s illegal for them to drive without a license, and
   b) it’s potentially dangerous to their health and safety.
Parents need to realise that they can apply the same principle to underage drinking.

4) If your under 18 asks to go to a party - let them! Teenage parties play an important part in them learning to socialise. However, you should set your own rules and boundaries around parties. Examples of these rules could include ....
   (i) that you can phone the hosts parent and confirm that they will not be allowing any alcohol
   (ii) that the parents will be providing supervision and if these conditions are met
   (iii) that you will drive them there and pick them up (or if another parent brings them home, make sure you are still awake when they come home).

5) Make sure your children know how to look after a person that is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs and they realise how frightening and unpleasant it will be. Explain the danger of a person dying from choking on their own vomit and make sure they are familiar with the recovery position. Tell them to never leave a drunken friend alone to ‘sleep it off’. Stress that giving water, bread, cold showers, etc will not sober someone up and may actually increase their level of risk. Make sure they know to call an ambulance if they can’t wake the person (because they aren’t asleep, they’re unconscious) and that a call to 000 doesn’t automatically mean the police will become involved.

6) Add the number 112 into your mobile and have your children do the same. This number will reach 000 even if a mobile doesn’t have a signal.
7) Understand that even though there are not more young people drinking today than ever before, - those that do, are drinking in a far more dangerous manner. Twenty five years ago underage boys drank beer and girls drank cheap wine (which could contain high levels of water and would usually make you throw up before too much alcohol was absorbed!!!). Today’s high risk drinkers drink spirits - usually straight with no mixers. Hence, the alcohol levels are far higher and the damage to their developing livers and brains is much greater.

8) If your children earn money from part time work - know how much they earn and make sure you know what they’re spending it on.

9) Never underestimate the power of parental disappointment. Make sure your children know what you expect from them and make sure they know what the consequences will be if they don’t meet your expectations.

and last but not least ...

10) Teenagers need a parent - not a 45 year old best friend! Even though most will never admit it, the majority of teenagers don’t want to find themselves in risky situations and they’re often hoping you will say “no”. So don’t be afraid to be a parent. Explain that saying “no” on a regular basis is part of your job description ... they’ll thank you when they’re older!