An Easy Way to Reduce Underage Drinking and Other Drug Abuse among Today’s Teens

Chances are your favorite teenager knows at least one friend/study group partner/teammate who consumes alcohol or other drugs. Chances are they are not aware of the risks they are taking that come with potentially life-changing, irreversible or tragic consequences when they consume any drug without a doctor’s supervision – or do not believe they could suffer such consequences.

And chances are the teen who uses drugs, whether occasionally or regularly, would stop this risky behavior if a friend tweeted or texted him/her, say, on a Friday afternoon or before a game, to say, “Hey, Friend, come hang with me and let’s (fill in their own drug-free activity)” or “Sorry I can’t join you (fill in date or event) but I just wanted to say please be safe and smart so we can continue to be teammates/ace that homework project together/go shopping next week/etc.”

This simple strategy is called e-SBI (Electronic Screening and Brief Intervention <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/eSBI.html>) and is an updated, teen-friendly version of the Screening and Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) technique, developed in the 1980’s (<http://focus.psychiatryonline.org/article.aspx?articleID=114939> and <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/YouthGuide>). SBIRT has repeatedly proven to be effective in helping substance abusers positively change their behavior; when used by adolescents, e-SBI has the added benefit of peer intervention, which is often more effective than other types of adolescent-focused intervention, whether the intent is to change study habits, bullying or other behaviors.

So please ask your teen if she/he would pick just one peer to check in with regularly. Alcohol and other drugs are more accessible than ever to our teens, and this is a great opportunity for yours to make a difference for a peer who might otherwise be headed down a dangerous road this year.

NOTE: Dr. Starr will host a community forum on underage substance abuse prevention on Thursday, October 7, at Richard Montgomery High School. Resource tables open at 6:30 PM and the event runs from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Save the date and tell your friends with children in private school!

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