

Alcohol Prevention During COVID-19

As physical distancing measures and stay at home orders have become the norm, states have looked for ways to reduce the economic impact on businesses. Many have classified liquor stores as essential businesses or have loosened alcohol sale restrictions, allowing alcoholic beverages to be sold by restaurants as a carry out item, such as here in Nebraska. Nationally, alcohol sales have risen dramatically, up 55% in March, compared to the same time last year. While some of this may be attributable to stockpiling (think toilet paper), we also know that some people may be turning to alcohol to help cope with the stress and anxiety of our new normal.

Why does this matter? According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “understanding parental influence on children through conscious and unconscious efforts, as well as when and how to talk with children about alcohol, can help parents have more influence than they might think on a child’s alcohol use.” Increased alcohol use by parents may unconsciously be sending a message to their kids that alcohol is an appropriate coping mechanism.

With so many kids and their parents home and spending more time together than usual, this is great opportunity to have a heart to heart conversation about alcohol and drugs. Studies have shown that talking with kids is one of the most powerful tools parents, educators, coaches, etc. can utilize to prevent kids starting to use or to decrease alcohol and drug use and abuse.

While talking about alcohol and drug use with your kids can be difficult, it doesn’t have to feel like you are reading them the riot act. Remain calm, relaxed and open to their questions and comments. Doing so generally results in them being more receptive to your thoughts, concerns and expectations.

Parents need to be aware of the reasons why kids might choose to use alcohol or drugs:

- **Fitting In/Socializing:** Kids may use alcohol or drugs to deal with their social insecurities or as a way to feel connected with a particular peer group.
- **Life Changes:** A life change, such as moving to a new town, divorce, a breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend or the death of a family member or friend, can be a time of confusion and struggle, which may lead kids to seek comfort and relief through alcohol or other drugs.
- **Emotional Psychological Wellbeing:** Persistent feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety and/or other mental health issues may lead kids to use alcohol and other drugs.

With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, kids may be feeling extremely anxious, worried about family finances, and missing their social relationships or activities. With that being said, we, as adults, need to remember it is not only important and vital to have these conversations with kids, it is also important that we remember we are their role models.

And once our schedules and daily lives return to a level of normalcy, we still need to remain diligent about talking with our kids.

For more information on alcohol and drug use prevention or to find more information on intervention and treatment services, please visit www.scipnebraska.com.

References:

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