

# SPEAK UP. FIND OUT. COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CHILD.

Results of the Youth Perception Survey 2013 (commissioned by the National Council Against Drug Abuse) found that **parents play an important role in deterring drug abuse amongst youths**. Youths surveyed indicated that they would approach their family (in particular parents), counsellors and teachers if they had any questions on drugs. As parents are most likely the first source of information, it is crucial for them to be well-informed in matters relating to drug abuse and to play an active role in reinforcing anti-drug messages to their children.

Communication helps to break down barriers between people and this is especially important in a family. In situations where you suspect your child of being involved with vices like drugs, frequent communication can help to open up conversation topics that might give clues to your child's involvement in such activities before it is too late.

Youths are easily impressionable and they are susceptible to picking up vice habits without having the maturity to distinguish between right and wrong. They may also become rebellious as they grow older, seeing this as a display of independence especially if they come into contact with the wrong group of friends. Eager to fit in and participate in the same activities as these friends, they may make the wrong life decision in a moment of folly. As a parent, communication at every level helps to shed light on the current developments in your child's life, and is critical in stemming any problems such as drug abuse before they even happen.

## HOW CAN I IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MY CHILD AND I?

- Weave in conversation topics like drug abuse when the opportunity arises during day-to-day activities. They can be introduced at family outings, at the dinner table, or even while watching TV together. For example, if the show is about the police carrying out a drug raid at nightclubs and a group of youths has been arrested, you can take this opportunity to ask your child for his views on drug abuse and have a sense of where he stands on the issue from his replies. You may also wish to discuss your own values, offer advice or warn your child about the grave consequences of dabbling in drugs during the conversation.
- Youths are more willing to keep away from risky behaviours such as experimenting with drugs when parents show interest in what they are doing and invest the time to explain concisely the irreversible and damaging effects. Be participative during the conversation and support your views with facts, while listening openly to what your child has to say. However, it is also important to step in with proper parental advice to steer him in the right direction. For example, you can remind him that certain decisions come with great responsibilities and consequences. Wrong decisions do not only hurt himself but also his loved ones.
- As communication is a two-way process, it is also important to listen with interest when your child talks to you about his daily life, problems or concerns. Even if you may disagree with the topic, demonstrate your willingness to discuss about it and to find a solution together. This shows that you value his views, which makes him more willing to listen to what you have to say rather than taking the usual top-down approach.
- In addition, non-verbal communication is just as important as active listening to children when they are talking. Always maintain a fully-engaged eye contact, nodding your head every now and then to give affirmation that you are listening to what he is saying. Smiling often and using appropriate facial expressions at different points during the conversation will also help to captivate his attention.

**INVEST THE TIME TO COMMUNICATE MORE WITH YOUR CHILD AND HE MIGHT OPEN UP CORNERS OF HIS LIFE PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN TO YOU.**