

SETTING LIMITS & FAMILY BOUNDARIES

Establishing and Enforcing Family Rules with Your Teenager

Conclusive research demonstrates that the longer kids delay their first alcohol experience, the more likely they are to avoid developing a drinking problem. We also know that experimental and prohibited behaviors are very appealing, beginning in middle school, making it necessary to begin our prevention efforts as early as possible.

- **Decide what's really important and establish a few non-negotiable rules based on safety. These might include rules about drinking, drugs, number of passengers in a car, and curfews. It's impossible to "cover the waterfront" and to enforce a great many rules, so pick those that matter the most and work out a consequence together.** *Rules about other issues (like school, chores, or clothing style, for example) should be clear and deliberated with opportunity for flex so that kids recognize the difference and the gravity of the non-negotiable rules.*

- **Remember that even though teens might protest, they need parents to set limits so they feel secure.** *Parental responsibility cannot be OUTSOURCED. Often, a parent is a teen's only 'NO'. Although there is no guarantee that responsible parents will always succeed at raising a child to be a responsible adult, the chances are almost nil that an irresponsible parent will succeed!*

- **Be consistent with penalties and with gender.** *Be certain to enforce a consequence for each infraction. Do not extend your son's curfew because he is a boy.*

- **Network with parents of your teen's friends. It will provide a safety net for them as well as for you because you'll be better informed about what is going on in your teen's lives and about how other parents handle situations.** *CALL other parents to get a feel for their expectations, and presence in their kids' lives (party, unsupervised activities...)*

- **If a specific behavior is driving you crazy, put some limits on the behavior. For example, if you must disagree - don't yell (if you must play acid rock – play it a lower volume)** *Teens will only be as responsible as parents who keep open lines of communication with them. Keep a constant dialogue and set parameters. We must be direct and detailed and repetitive about what 'responsible' means, and what our 'parameters' are.*

- **When you're feeling stressed out, take time out. Do something you enjoy as an individual or as a couple. Rediscover an interest of your own. It will renew your enthusiasm for parenting and help you to be more effective! Finally keep your sense of humor.** *Sometimes the best thing you can do when you have a teen is to laugh – and to persevere!*