

➤ *Sexual health problems such as unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, sexual assault and rape, will be reduced.*

➤ *People are less likely to say or do things to others they might later regret.*

➤ *Family standards or parent expectations will be satisfied.*

➤ *There is no need to lie to parents or be secretive.*

Many relationships have been damaged by the excessive use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

The benefits to adolescents of not using alcohol and other drugs are clear. While none of the suggested benefits alone is likely to persuade young people to delay a decision to use, together they can equip parents and other adults with talking points that go beyond the fact that drinking alcohol and using tobacco and other drugs is illegal.

These benefits can be communicated to young people slowly, one at a time, by parents, teachers, relatives, clergy, employers, coaches, advisors, activity directors and any other adult in the community.

Collectively, the same message by many messengers can make a powerful, positive influence on the choices young people make about alcohol and other drug use.

Choices And Influences

Choosing Not to Use: Benefits for Adolescents



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“Have a good time at the party tonight and remember I don’t want you to do any drinking.”

—Scott, parent

“Okay, but I don’t see what the big deal is; you drink beer whenever you want to.”

—Nicole, teenager

This dialogue is repeated in homes throughout the country every weekend night. We tell our children not to drink alcohol, use tobacco or use other drugs and remind them that they are illegal. Often that’s where the conversation ends and our children wonder if there are any real benefits from not using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.

Certainly we can tell our children about the risks of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. We can give clear examples of how use is unhealthy, unnecessary and inappropriate, as well as illegal. However, what can we say about the benefits of nonuse that can help our children delay or avoid the use? Here are a few suggestions:

1. The risks of experiencing alcohol-related problems are greatly reduced.

The person who chooses not to drink will:

- *not be troubled by legal problems from underage drinking or other drug use;*
- *not become addicted;*

- *reduce the risk of involvement in an alcohol, or other drug-related traffic crash;*

- *reduce the risk of involvement in an alcohol, or other drug-related swimming or boating accident; and*

- *reduce the risk of involvement in a violent act related to the use of alcohol or other drugs.*

Alcohol and other drug use is a major factor in all of these situations.

2. Life skills can develop fully.

The adolescent who chooses to abstain from alcohol, tobacco or other drug use gives him-/herself the best opportunity to develop skills in:

- *stress management,*
- *problem solving/decision making,*
- *goal setting,*
- *conflict resolution, and*
- *effective communication.*

Alcohol, tobacco and other drug use can mask problems and interfere with the development of these important life skills.

3. Performance in many areas is best when free of the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

When free of the influence of alcohol and other drugs, young people can perform a variety of tasks with full judgment and physical skills, such as:

- *academic performance,*
- *athletic performance,*
- *driving any kind of vehicle,*

- *using equipment and tools, and*

- *music or dramatic arts.*

Alcohol and other drug use can diminish motivation, impair judgment and reduce physical and intellectual performance in many areas.

4. Physical, emotional, social and spiritual development can occur normally and naturally.

The adolescent’s goal of maturing toward independence, self-responsibility and a purposeful life is best achieved without the interference of alcohol, tobacco or other drug use. Examples of benefits include:

- *normal physiological and hormonal growth and development;*
- *normal moral, spiritual and emotional development;*
- *normal ability to solve typical problems and cope with normal stress; and*
- *normal ability to interact and get along with others.*

Alcohol, tobacco and other drug use can disrupt normal development and actually interfere with maturation.

5. Relationships can develop honestly and be based on mutual interests.

Young people who meet and talk together when sober do not have to be concerned about the effect alcohol, tobacco or other drugs might have on what they say or what is said to them.

- *Morale on teams or groups will not be impaired.*