

METHAMPHETAMINE UPDATE

Testing 1-2-3

Many parents may needlessly worry that their teen or even preteen is using alcohol or other drugs. There may be a political conflict between a child's rights as a member of a free society and a parent's obligation as a caretaker of a developing individual. Parents would be wise to consider that liberty and maturity need to go hand in hand, and that a parents need to know what's going on supersedes other considerations.

Problems arise when we ignore a biological truth: the part of the brain responsible for safe and healthy choices isn't fully developed until the early twenties. A Temple University psychologist, Laurence Steinberg, has analyzed adolescent studies from the past decade and concludes that, "Adolescents are at an age where they do not have full capacity to control themselves. As adults, we need to do some of the controlling." No one likes the idea of being controlled; the very thought sends a shiver of resistance up our spine. But it is worthwhile to remember that a parent is 100% responsible for the consequences of a child's actions, and therefore has both the right and responsibility to control some aspects of an adolescent's behavior.

Knowing where to apply control is not possible unless a parent knows what is going on, and a *using* teen is not going to volunteer that information. Nor is a *using* teen going to think highly of your idea to have them tested. Remember the word "parent" implies that you are in charge. The bottom line is that if you think there is a problem because of changes in health, behavior patterns such as eating and sleeping, escalating mood swings, unusual changes in associations or dramatic shifts in school performance, you have a right to the peace of mind you will get from ruling out drug abuse. A parent can make an anonymous call to Behavioral Health (530-891-2810), Public Health (530-538-7341), or Children's Services (530-538-7617) to get help with a concern or a referral for more information. Questions can also be submitted at the www.2stopmeth.org webaddress.

If you decide to test, the family doctor can provide a referral to a local diagnostic clinic. Urinalysis kits are also available from local pharmacies and appear to run in the \$30-40 range. Public Health does confidential onsite testing for \$20.00 provided the youth consents to the test. It may be helpful to call one of the previously mentioned numbers to get more information about signs that there may be a problem, how to talk to a teen about your decision to test and testing procedures that will be likely to achieve accurate results. In a best case scenario you may discover your suspicions were wrong and get to hear a relieving "I told you so."

It is reasonable that one of our parenting goals should be to get our children to adulthood without any addictions, even if they aren't quick to thank us for it. Of course the best model for abstinence is abstinence, and the best motivation for abstinence is close ties with clean and sober parents. Upcoming articles will provide more information about adolescent needs, services and information resources.

