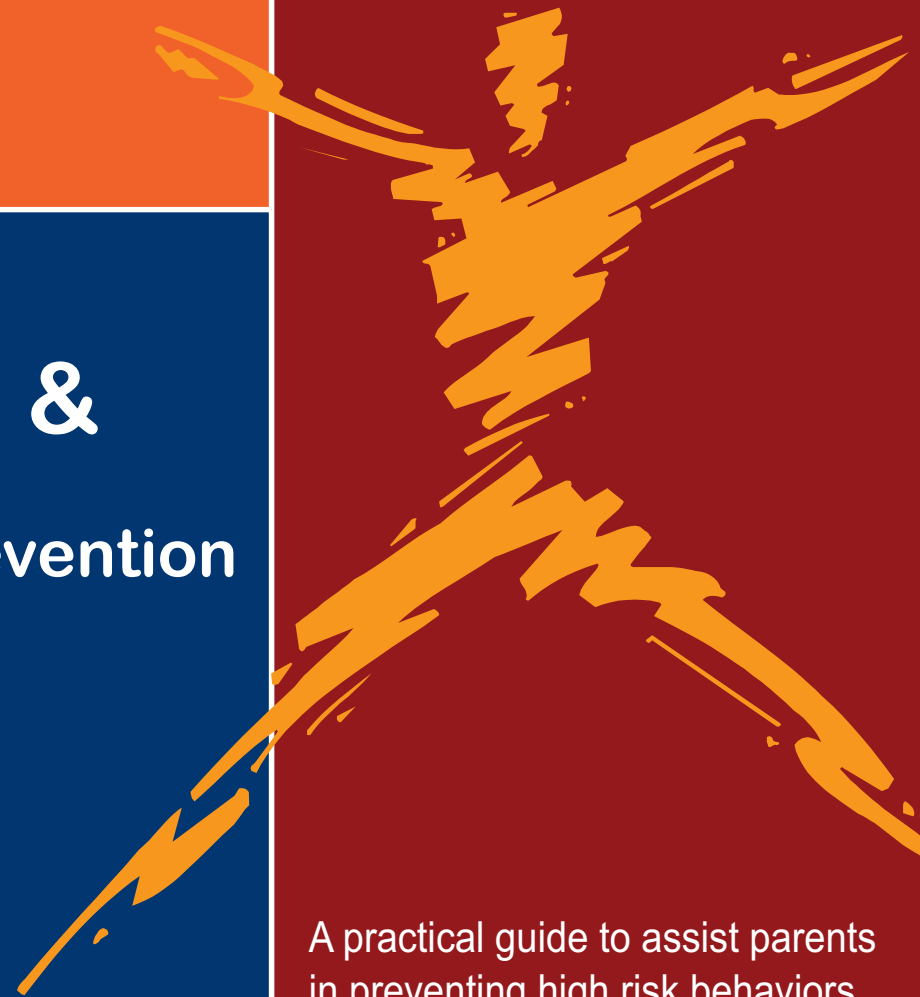


Parents



pre-teens

&
prevention



A practical guide to assist parents
in preventing high risk behaviors
in their pre-teens



What is Partners in Prevention?



Partners in Prevention brings together professionals from various organizations who are interested in supporting parents in the prevention of addiction-related high-risk behaviors among young people. It is made up of representatives of the following organizations:

- The Lester B. Pearson School Board (Student Services Department, Health Promotion Program)
- The International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviors (McGill University)
- Portage Substance Abuse Treatment Program for Adolescents
- The Montreal Police (SPVM)
- RCMP Drug & Organized Crime Awareness Service
- YMCA West Island

Why this booklet?

This booklet aims to provide parents of grade 6 elementary school students with a practical guide on the prevention of addiction-related high-risk behaviors. Pre-teens need to be equipped with both knowledge and skills to make healthy choices well before they are faced with difficult decisions. This booklet provides practical tips, resource information and links to reputable websites that parents may find helpful in the prevention of any of these behaviors.

"My perception is that my mother felt powerless and felt she could not make a difference in my choices, this was not true."

(Janice, Portage teen resident)

What is meant by "addiction-related high-risk behaviors"?

Throughout the brochure, the term addiction-related high-risk behavior refers to:

- tobacco use
- drug use
- alcohol use
- gambling

There are common elements among these behaviors. Efforts to prevent any one of them will have a positive effect on preventing the others.



TOO EARLY for PREVENTION?

But isn't it a little too early for prevention?

It is never too early to start prevention. According to the recent (2008) *Quebec survey on Smoking, Alcohol, Drugs, and Gambling in High School Students* conducted by l'Institut de la statistique du Québec, young people who experiment with smoking, alcohol, drugs or gambling have had:

- their first cigarette at the age of 12.7 years —
- their first alcoholic beverage at the age of 12.6 years —
- their first experience with marijuana at 13.4 years of age —
- their first experience with gambling as early as 11.6 years old —

It is a good idea to discuss these issues with our children well before their high school years. Through the internet children already have access to a great deal of information. Discussions with our pre-teens might ensure that the information that they are receiving is accurate and well-balanced.

COMMUNICATION

Communication

Communication is one of the keys to building and maintaining positive relationships. When parents know who their children's friends are, what they are doing in school and what their pre-occupations are, they are showing interest and involvement.

The single most important thing that parents can do is to listen to their pre-teens. This can help them learn more about their child's needs and concerns. Active listening is a strong foundation to a trusting relationship. Sharing meals, for example, can go a long way in creating a climate that facilitates communication.

"During difficult times, I've had to turn to many people and things for help. Going to someone really close to me helped me a lot; they gave me inspiration and advice to get better."

(Alexa, Secondary 3 student)



When it comes to high-risk behaviors... where do parents begin?

Take advantage of teachable moments

Everyday situations can be used as teachable moments to initiate discussions. For example, when a child sees gambling-oriented toys in a store, when parents serve alcohol to their guests, when a child watches a television program where someone is abusing drugs, etc. These are all teachable moments.

Know the facts

Parents can start by being well informed. An updated list of reputable web-sites and resources is provided at the end of the guide.

Provide honest and accurate information

It is important that parents speak to their pre-teens truthfully and avoid scare tactics as pre-teens will most likely see through attempts to exaggerate consequences. Parents can encourage their pre-teens to ask questions, answering in a straightforward way. Before answering, parents can ask their pre-teens what they think first. This can help to get a sense of the young person's level of understanding and parents can then adjust their explanation accordingly. It is okay not to know all of the answers. It is better for parents to tell their pre-teens that they are not sure and suggest finding the answers together. It may not be possible to cover everything in one conversation as information is processed over time.

"I have been in and out of my addiction for the last five years. All I can say is be open and honest with your kids and put all the cards on the table and don't be afraid to tell them how you really feel."

(Anonymous,
Portage teen resident)

Answering questions about the past

For a parent, the decision to disclose information about the past is a personal one. There is no right or wrong decision. Some parents find that disclosing some information about their past experiences gives them an opportunity to discuss the risks involved in these actions. Regardless of parents past experiences, they still have every right to have expectations of non-use for their own children.

Actions speak louder than words

Parents have heard it said that they are role models and that their children learn from what they see. If parents are abusing alcohol, drugs or gambling, they need to seek help. When it comes to smoking cigarettes, if parents are unable to quit they can still play an active role in preventing their child from smoking by communicating their expectations, not smoking in the house, setting consequences for smoking and following through. Parents may find it helpful to share their own story about why they started to smoke and the challenges that they faced if they have tried quitting. Under no circumstances should parents provide their teens with drugs or use drugs with them.

"I have a close home life and spend a lot of time with my family. Having a mother that sets guidelines and rules keeps me safe."
(Kayla, Secondary 3 student)

Why do young people experiment with smoking, drug or alcohol use or gambling?

The desire to experiment and take some risks is common during adolescence. Teens who experiment may do so to satisfy their curiosity, because it feels good, to reduce stress, to fit in or to feel grown up.

From experimentation to abuse...various degrees of involvement

Most people who have experimented with drugs, alcohol or gambling don't deliberately set out to have a substance abuse or gambling problem. In fact, most do not end up developing a problem. Drug and alcohol use and involvement in gambling can be situated on a continuum:

"The one thing I suggest is to find a balance between controlling and caring. Don't be afraid to ask for help."
 (Portage teen resident)

Non use	Experimental use	Occasional use	Regular use	Problem use	Abusive use
The individual never uses drugs or alcohol or participates in gambling activities.	The individual uses drugs or alcohol or partakes in gambling activities out of curiosity.	The individual uses alcohol or drugs or participates in gambling activities on an irregular basis for pleasure or on special occasions or in specific social situations.	The individual actively seeks to use drugs or alcohol or participate in gambling activities on a regular basis. This type of use suggests a predisposition to problematic use.	The individual uses, and plans on using, drugs or alcohol or partakes in gambling activities more than once per week, investing much time and money. This type of use reflects underlying problems and suggests a predisposition to addiction.	The individual uses drugs or alcohol or participates in gambling activities in an excessive and uncontrolled manner. They may take large amounts or mix substances, or in the case of gambling, spend much more money and time on gambling than initially intended. This type of use can have serious consequences physically, psychologically and socially.
Non	Experimental	Occasional	Regular	Problem	Abusive

"I actually feel more powerful when I say no. I try not to go near anything or anyone doing stuff I don't want to get involved in. Now that I'm in grade nine, doing so has been a little more difficult and I have been offered a few times but I am extremely comfortable with saying NO loud and clear. One other thing is that I am aware of all the people who would be very disappointed in me."
 (Janice, Secondary 3 student)

What makes one teen more at risk than another?

It is often a combination of factors that determines whether a person develops a problem with alcohol, drugs and gambling. These are called risk factors. By the same token, some factors can act as a buffer, helping reduce an individual's chances of developing a problem. These are called protective factors.

Risk factors **RISK FACTORS**

Some risk factors include: _____

- easy access to substances or gambling activities
- drug use or gambling among peers
- parental or sibling substance abuse or gambling problems
- family conflict, lack of parental supervision
- the substances used, quantity and frequency of use
- school problems (decrease in interest and grades, truancy)
- impulsivity, sensation seeking
- early initiation (age of onset) to substance use or gambling



"I just don't want to get involved in that no matter how hard it is to say no or how sad I am"
 (Jordana, Secondary 3 student)

"Sports have always been a big part in my life. Turning to sports has helped me meet new people and keep a positive outlook on life without turning to drugs or alcohol."
 (Justin, Secondary 3 student)

Protective factors **PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

Some protective factors include: _____

- strong self-esteem
- school connectedness
- strong problem solving skills
- strong social skills
- positive family cohesion and bonding
- connectedness to the community (availability of resources)
- significant relationship with an adult

Tipping the balance

Parents can influence the outcome of their child's well-being by doing all that they can to decrease risk factors and increase protective factors.

"The best advice I can give you is don't approach your child too meanly or passively. My mom was too aggressive with me and I ended up lying to her to the point where she barely knew who I was. I have seen parents who were not assertive enough and the child got the impression they could do anything they wished. The only thing I could really say is to try to find a balance and tough it through."
 (Celine, 15 year old Portage resident)

THE SIGNS...

What are the signs that a young person might be involved with smoking, alcohol, marijuana or gambling?

A combination of physical and behavioral signs could indicate involvement with smoking, marijuana, alcohol or gambling. Parents need to keep in mind that a cluster of these signs could also indicate other underlying problems that may also need to be addressed. **It is more important to consider sudden or uncharacteristic changes in behavior and personality than to rely solely on lists of signs and symptoms.**

"My daughter has been in Portage for almost 5 months. I never thought she would ever take pills. As a mother, maybe I should have seen the signs."

(Monique, mother of a Portage teen resident)

PHYSICAL SIGNS

Some physical signs that may indicate that a young person is under the influence of drugs or alcohol:

- Red eyes (marijuana use)
- Difficulty speaking, slurred speech
- Slower movements or agitation
- Excessive sleepiness or insomnia
- Dry or pasty mouth
- Food cravings (munchies) or loss of appetite
- Smell of alcohol on breath, smell of marijuana on clothing
- Physical signs will differ depending on the product(s) consumed as well as the quantity used

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

Some behavioral signs of possible involvement with alcohol, drugs or gambling could include:

- Lying or being more secretive
- Increased anxiety, mood swings, irritability
- Changes in academic interest and performance, loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Changes in routine (often comes home later, asks to stay over at friends more frequently, etc.)
- Changes in friends, more secrecy about friendships
- Changes in personality

"If your child does drugs and you know they do drugs, do something about it right away. My mom didn't. She let me get away with stuff."

(Anthony, 13 year old Portage resident)

CONCERN...

What can parents do if they are concerned?

If a parent suspects that their teen is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, it is best to delay discussions until the young person is sober, the young persons' safety being the most immediate concern.

It is important to try to stay calm in order to keep the lines of communication open. Taking a step back allows parents to respond in a less reactive manner. Parents can express their concern, asking questions and listening to what their pre-teens have to say. They can let their teen know their position and expectations, expressing concern in a non-judgmental way.

CONCERN...

It is best to strive for a balanced response, avoiding extreme reactions of being either too tolerant or too authoritarian. **It is important for parents to remember that they do not have to prove that their teen is involved with smoking, drugs, alcohol or gambling to raise the topic and express their concern.** Sometimes parents simply need to trust their feelings and intuition, keeping in mind that any involvement with tobacco, drugs alcohol or gambling during the pre-teen years is a concern that should be taken seriously. Parents need to remember that even if they do their very best to guide their pre-teens, they may still experiment with smoking, drug or alcohol use or gambling and that all efforts to delay the age of onset are beneficial.

"When I did not come home my mom would freak out and yell and scream at me. Coming from the perspective of a 14 year old I thought she was crazy and she didn't care and she only wanted to make my life a living hell. Now, four years later at 18, I am able to be more objective, I realize the anger came from hurt and fear. I just wish that she was able to express that because then I would have been more open to what she had to say to me".

(Portage teen resident)



PREVENTION

SIGNS



CONCERN

"Don't be afraid to
call social services
or a drug and
alcohol counselor.
One thing you need
to do is NEVER
give up on your kid."
(Richard, Portage teen resident)

ACTIONS

RISK

COMMUNICATION

The PDF version of this brochure is available at:

<http://sservices.lbpsb.qc.ca> (see *Health Promotion* tab
and scroll down to *Partners in Prevention*)

AND

www.youthgambling.com (prevention section)

References:

Éduc'alcool (2004), Be prepared to talk to your children about drinking

Gouvernement du Québec, MSSS, Comité permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie, (1999),
How to improve family harmony, preventing alcoholism and addiction

Government of Canada, (2008), Talking With Your Teen about Drugs

Gouvernement du Québec, MSSS, Comité Permanent de lutte à la toxicomanie, (1999),
Teenagers and Parents: Bringing Together Two Solitudes

Government of Canada, (2008), Talking With Your Teen about Drugs

Health Canada, (2008), Help Your Child Stay Smoke-free: A guide to protecting your
child against tobacco use

Institut de la statistique du Québec, (2004, 2006, 2008), Québec Survey of Smoking,
Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling in High School Students

NOTES

Information and support for parents



Seeking the support of other parents, parenting groups or specialized organizations can go a long way toward helping parents avoid feelings of isolation and can provide them with tools and strategies to support their pre-teens.

The following resources provide parents and young people with information, help and support:

Local Centre de santé et de services sociaux (CLSC's) :

CSSS de Dorval-Lachine-Lasalle 514-364-6700
CSSS de L'Ouest de l'île 514-626-2572
CSSS du Sud-Ouest-Verdun 514-766-0546
CSSS Vaudreuil-Soulanges 450-455-6171

Specialized resources:

Drugs Help and Referral 514-527-2626 or 1-800-265-2626
Gambling Help and Referral 514-527-0140 or 1-800-461-0140
Pavilion Foster 514-486-1304
Portage West-Island 514-694-9894

The following websites may be helpful in providing accurate and current information on tobacco, alcohol, drugs and gambling.

www.msss.gouv.qc.ca (Provincial Government)
www.dependances.gouv.qc.ca (Provincial Government-Information Addictions)
www.parlonsdrogue.com (Provincial Government-Information Substances)
www.hc-sc.gc.ca (Health Canada A-Z index Alcohol, Drugs, Tobacco)
www.publichealth.gc.ca (Public Health Agency of Canada)
www.albertahealthservices.ca (Alberta Health Services)
www.camh.net (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health- Canada)
www.drugabuse.gov (National Institute on Drug Abuse-United States)
www.youthgambling.com (International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High Risk Behaviors-McGill University)

www.cancer.ca (Canadian Cancer Society)
www.lung.ca (Canadian Lung Association)
www.educalcool.qc.ca (Alcohol Information-Québec)
www.spvm.qc.ca (Montreal Police)

