

Tips for guiding your children through the preschool years

Since the foundation for all healthy habits — from nutrition to toothbrushing— is laid down during the preschool years, this is a great time to set the stage for a drug-free life. The following 7 tips will help you work with your preschooler so that he or she will grow up happy, healthy and drug-free.

- **Talk to your child about the joys of healthy living.** Explain the importance of taking good care of our bodies — eating right, exercising and getting a good night's sleep. Discuss how good you feel when you take care of yourself — how you can run, jump, play and work for many hours. A great conversation starter: "I'm glad I'm healthy because I can..."
- **Celebrate your child's decision-making skills.** Whenever possible, let your child choose what to wear. Even if the clothes don't quite match, you are reinforcing your child's ability to make decisions.
- **Stress the need for your child to take personal responsibility for his own health, well-being and personal environment.** Your instructions should be concrete, related to your child's experiences, and stated positively. Turn chores like brushing teeth, putting away toys, wiping up spills, and caring for pets into fun experiences that your child will enjoy. Break the activities down into manageable steps so that your child learns to develop plans.
- **Help your child steer clear of dangerous substances that exist in her immediate world.** Point out poisonous and harmful chemicals commonly found in homes, such as bleach, kitchen cleansers and furniture polish. Read the products' warning labels out loud to your child. Explain that she should only eat or smell food or a prescribed medicine that you, a relative or other known caregivers give to her. Also, explain that drugs from the doctor help the person the doctor gives them to but that they can harm someone else.
- **Help your child understand the difference between make-believe and real life.** Preschoolers give meaning to things they don't understand in order to make sense of their world — but their meaning doesn't necessarily reflect the real world. Ask your child what he thinks about a TV program or story. Let your child know about your likes and dislikes. Discuss how violence or bad decisions can hurt people.
- **Turn frustration into a learning opportunity.** If a tower of blocks keeps collapsing during a play session, work with your child to find possible solutions to the problem.
- **Tell your child how proud you are of her when she helps you with things.** There's never a bad time to give your child a boost of self-esteem.

Substances in your preschooler's world can include:

Tobacco, Alcohol, cleaning supplies.

<http://www.drugfree.org/the-parent-toolkit/>