



KIDS & DRUGS

**Listen to that voice inside you,
and do what is best for you.**

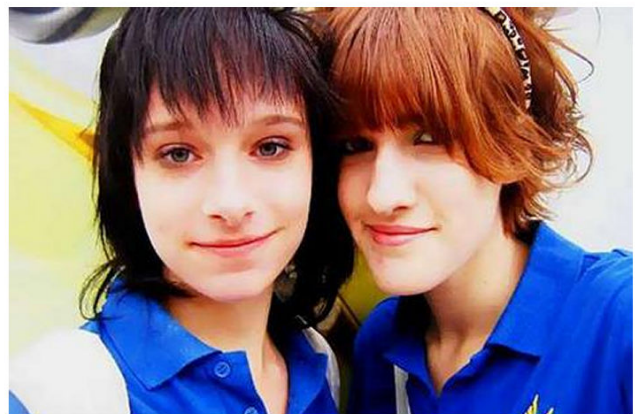
By the time you get to be about 12 or 13 years old, all of the talk you have heard about alcohol and other drugs can be really confusing. Adults may say drinking is bad and then do it themselves. Someone says a certain drug is bad and someone else says it is okay. You hear some older kids, like your older brother or sister, talking about their really neat weekend of drinking and then see a TV ad that says that drinking causes big problems for people.

Everyday you see and hear a lot of different things about drugs and the people who use them. There are radio and TV ads for beer and many things that are supposed to make a cold or headache feel better. Magazines have stories about celebrities, rock stars and athletes who have messed up their lives with drugs and alcohol. One adult says drinking is terrible. Another adult thinks it is great fun and may offer you a beer.

Making sense of all this can be tough. It is hard to understand why alcohol and drugs suddenly become such a big deal when you become a teenager.

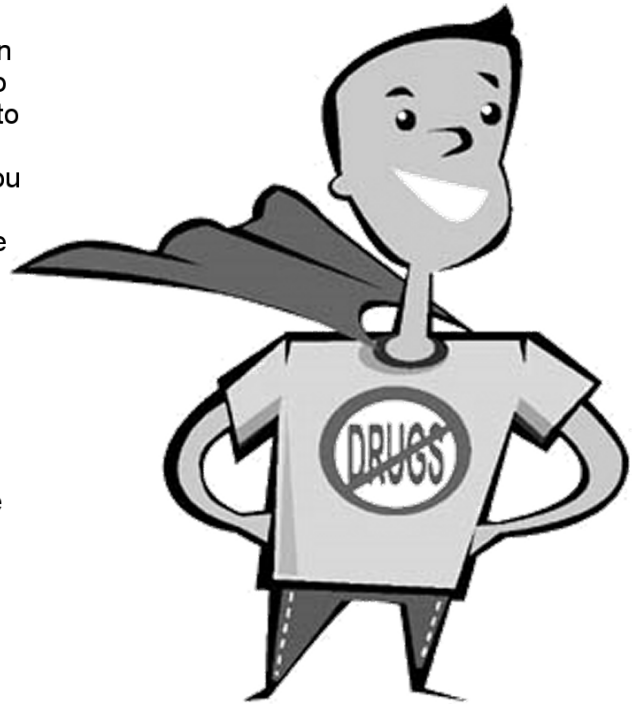
While you are a child you are cared for by your parents and the whole world treats you as a child. When you get to be a teenager you want to do more for yourself and you think of yourself in new ways. At some point, you will see yourself as a young adult.

As you start to feel older and more adult, you get interested in the things that older teens and adults do. Especially the things that have been off limits to you as a child. Alcohol and other drugs may come into the picture along with ways of dressing and talking and having fun. Changes in your life and the way you feel may get you interested in these things.



Sometimes you act on your feelings rather than sitting down and thinking about the right way to deal with a situation. You may forget to listen to that voice in your head that says “Stop! Think! Is this what I really want?” In the same way you may get the urge to experiment with alcohol or another drug. Perhaps out of curiosity. Maybe because you friends are trying it. But always remember to listen and trust that little voice in your head that asks: Where will this lead me?

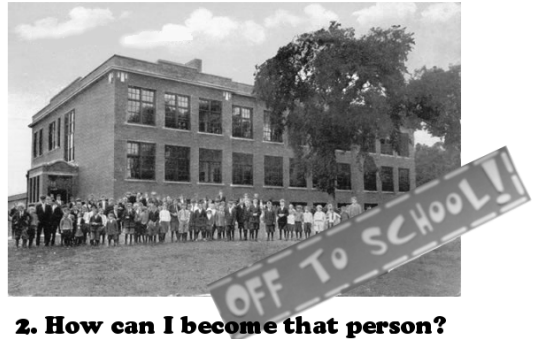
It is a good idea to plan in advance. This will help you to know what to say when someone offers you alcohol or other drugs. And even if it happens today before you’ve had a chance to give it much thought you can always take a moment to listen to the voice in your head. Trust yourself and your ability to think things through. Do what is best for you, not only for right now, but for tomorrow and next week and so on.



Take some time and think about these 4 things:



1. What kind of person do I want to be?



2. How can I become that person?



3. How do drugs and alcohol fit into that picture?



4. What happens to me if I become addicted?

We don't often think about the kind of people we are or the kind of people we would like to be. What makes us feel good? Why do we sometimes wish things could be different? In all of the things that happen to us what really seems to matter?

If we do take the time to get a picture in our mind of what we really want for ourselves it helps us make the right choices. When an important question comes up you can ask yourself: "Does this help me get what I am after?" Is this right for me?"

Most of us want to do interesting things with good friends. We want to know that other people like us and enjoy having us around. We don't need to be perfect, but we want to feel good about ourselves and what we can do. We want to feel as if we can handle whatever comes along as we spend time with family and friends, meet people and take on new things, such as trying a new sport or going to a new school.



Alcohol and other drugs can put you off track in two ways. First by using these drugs you may think you can take a shortcut to the kind of person you want to be. It's like wanting to be good on a skateboard. You can go and buy the hottest board and walk around with it under your arm, that's the easy part. But it does not make you any good on the board. In the same way people try to look cool by using alcohol and drugs. But most times it's just a way of hiding that they feel insecure and uneasy with themselves.

So how do we get to be this way? Being liked, feeling OK when you are with people, being good at things and feeling more sure of yourself are all things you pick up as you spend more time with people and do more things. You take what you learned today and add it to everything else you have already learned in life. Some things you do help you get better at talking to people or let you find a new way to have fun. Another day you feel a little more confident when you discover that you can do something that you have never tried before. Step by step you get to be a person who will do just fine as you move through your teens.



Secondly, by not thinking, you can get off track and allow yourself to go in a direction which leads to drug problems. It is hard to feel good about how your life is going the day after you get into big trouble at school because of drinking or other drug use.

The decisions you make about drugs should be decisions that make sense when you stop to think about what is important to you. They should be decisions that leave you feeling good because you are taking control of your own life. You are using your head to make the good things happen and to keep the risks and the problems away.



The tricky thing about many drug decisions is that you never know exactly when you will have to make them. They kind of jump up at you. One day you are out somewhere and someone offers you a joint or a drink. Or maybe you need to get home from baby sitting or a party and the person who is supposed to drive you has been drinking. Right when it's happening it can be tough to know what to do. Knowing what's important to you and having thought about that kind of situation ahead of time makes all the difference. With a minute to think about it, you are back in control and doing what's right for you.

It's your decision.

You can make the right one.

Do it for yourself.