



## NEW SCHOOL YEAR, NEW HABITS; MAKE SURE THEY ARE THE RIGHT ONES



[www.DFYIT.org](http://www.DFYIT.org)

### Drug Free Youth in Town

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### Back to School Advice for Parents from South Florida's Leading Prevention Organization

August, 2007 -The yearly pilgrimage from summer vacation to school is a familiar one for youth and families across the nation. Exciting and dreaded at once – friendly reunions and new encounters, worn routines and fresh challenges, familiar habits and new surroundings. School is a unique social world for teens, filled with trepidation at the beginning of each school year. And while returning from their summer sojourn, youth can also face potential dangers as they ease into their new routines, including the temptation for drug or alcohol use – markedly when entering high school, or making new groups of friends and increased peer pressure to belong or fit in. That is why it is vital for parents to understand the challenges that youth can face when going back to school, and prepare themselves and their kids.

A local organization called DFYIT (Drug Free Youth In Town), also helps teens and young adults as they transition into and through middle and high school. DFYIT is committed to reducing the risk of drug and alcohol abuse in youth and runs clubs and prevention programs in 63 Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Not only does DFYIT teach students about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, it empowers youth by encouraging and rewarding positive behaviors, pro-active involvement in school and the community, in a stimulating, fun and safe environment.

DFYIT also acts as a partner with parents, providing youth with the necessary tools as defense against the temptations of drugs and alcohol. As has been proven time and again, knowledge is one of the most powerful weapons to combat drug abuse amongst teens. Parents too, can never be too informed or too involved in the lives of their children. In a survey conducted by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America (PDFA) in 2005, it was found that parents greatly underestimate youth drug use. Of the parents and youth surveyed, 39% of teens admitted to smoking marijuana, whereas only 18% of parents believed their child had tried drugs.

### To that end, DFYIT presents some important advice for parents, to help their teens start off on the right foot in the new school year:

**CHECK IN** - A 2005 study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found that students whose parents checked on their child's progress with homework or otherwise monitored their after school behavior were significantly less likely to use illicit drugs or alcohol than students whose parents rarely or never checked up on them (8.1% vs. 17.4%).

**IT'S GOOD TO TALK** - Talk frankly and frequently about drug use. Teens are far less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol if their parents talk with them about potential dangers. Frequency increases the chances of positive impact.

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## About DFYIT

DFYIT – Drug Free Youth In Town – is a nationally recognized, community-based substance abuse prevention organization that focuses on and gives recognition to students who choose to live a healthy, drug-free lifestyle.

Through 60 DFYIT clubs in Miami-Dade County middle and senior high schools, DFYIT provides adolescents with social competency training, drug awareness counseling, conflict resolution skills, positive adult relationships, and pro-social involvement in their school and community. For more information on DFYIT, please visit their website at [www.dfyit.org](http://www.dfyit.org).

**TAKE A LOOK AROUND** - Explore the school's drug education and prevention programs. Use of illicit drugs among students exposed to such in-school programs is much lower than students who do not participate. Programs such as DFYIT, offer both in and out of school activities for students, significantly reduce substance abuse. 98.1% of DFYIT members test negative.

**PEER PRESSURE** - Discuss techniques to avoid negative influences from peers. Teen approval of peer drug use gradually increases with age, so that a 17 year old is more likely to approve of their friends using drugs than a 13 year old, making the behavior more acceptable as high school wears on.

**LEARN THE LINGO** - Know what's out there. Favored drugs, like slang, change from generation to generation (though some things remain the same- marijuana and alcohol are still the most widely used substances). Listen for mentions of tweak, gooney, crank and ice (all names for crystal meth), and keep any prescription drugs under a watchful eye.

**ONLINE TWITTER** - No parent wants to feel like a spy, but officials from Caron Treatment Centers urge parents to monitor their kid's online activity. Many sites like MySpace or social networking sites can be breeding grounds for explicit talk and exchanges, where teens openly discuss their drug and/or alcohol use, as well as sexual activities.

**ALARM BELLS** – Known the warning signs of drug use. Take notice of changes such as acting distant from family or friends, hanging out with a different crowd, sudden changes in moods or attitudes, lack of interest in personal appearance, changes in clothing, and dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits. Remember, as these all sound rather typical of teenagers; it is the change to look for.

**GRADES** - Monitor academic performance, as D-average students are 5 times more likely to have used drugs or alcohol in the past month than A-average students.

Parents, some of the struggles that teenagers face are acceptance and rebellion, which often fall and-in-hand. Remember to approach teens, not in skepticism or distrust; but be open and honest about all issues. You'll notice how ready they will be to do the same.

DFYIT's program has already impacted the lives of more than 200,000 youth and their families in South Florida, and continues to through its innovative and scientifically-proven curriculum. For further information about DFYIT, please contact Executive Director, Barbara Zohlman on 305.971.0607 or visit [www.dfyit.org](http://www.dfyit.org).

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