

Keeping KIDS Safe

A GUIDE TO DRUG AND ALCOHOL PREVENTION

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Red Ribbon Week History

Since 1985, the Red Ribbon has been a symbol of commitment to raise awareness of the death and destruction drugs cause in America.

Celebrated each year October 23-31, the Red Ribbon campaign serves as a way to educate American youth in drug prevention activities. The campaign was organized by The National Family Partnership (NFP.)

The origins of the Red Ribbon are not without tragedy. In 1985, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency agent Kiki Camarena was close to unlocking a multibillion-dollar marijuana and cocaine pipeline in Mexico. Camarena was kidnapped and murdered by the very drug traffickers he was so close to shutting down.

This event had such great impact that Americans began to wear red ribbons in honor of the fallen DEA agent and the stand against drugs and the violence they cause.

RED RIBBON WEEK ACHIEVEMENTS

The NFP estimates that more than 80 million people have participated in Red Ribbon events. It is a way for communities to take a unified stand against drugs and violence.

In 1988, the first National Red Ribbon Week occurred with President and Mrs. Reagan serving as honorary chairpersons.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

There are numerous ways you can become involved in Red Ribbon Week. Here are a few examples from the DEA on how to excite and engage your community:

- Display red ribbons inside and outside local businesses;
- Invite your local officials to participate in activities that promote Red Ribbon Week;
- Post fact sheets about the dangers of drugs in highly visible places such as churches, gyms or grocery stores; and
- Organize a fair that promotes drug awareness.

No matter how you choose to become involved in Red Ribbon Week, your effort can make a big difference in educating youth on the dangers of drug abuse.

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This Year's Campaign

Each year in October, Red Ribbon Week follows a new theme; this year's is "YOLO. Be Drug Free."

The theme — focused on the "you only live once" motto — was created by a pair of sixth-graders at Claysburg Kimmel Elementary School in Claysburg, Pa. As an award for creating this year's theme, the school is receiving national recognition and $500 in merchandise supporting Red Ribbon Week.

A TRUE ADVOCATE: HONORING NANCY REAGAN

On March 6, 2016, America lost one of its biggest fighters in the war on drugs when Nancy Reagan passed away at the age of 94. She left behind a legacy of anti-drug campaigns and millions of Americans that benefited from the programs she headed.

In 1986, Reagan told the American people to "Just Say No" to drugs. This phrase become a pop culture axiom and the motto for D.A.R.E.



Nancy Reagan

ABOUT NANCY REAGAN

Born in New York City in 1921, Reagan was born to a salesman father and a radio actress mother. She landed her first acting gig in 1940, and less than a decade later met her future husband and the future president of the United States Ronald Reagan. The couple married in 1952.

Upon becoming the First Lady of the United States in 1981, it didn't take Reagan long to begin her fight against drug use in America. She spent nearly her entire time as First Lady as head of many different drug awareness organizations. Her battle against drugs lasted long after her time in the White House.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

During an address to the nation on federal drug policy, Reagan said, "Few things in my life have frightened me as much as the drug epidemic among our children." She proved this as a concern by heading numerous drug awareness campaigns including The Chemical People, Just Say No and The Parent Movement.

Her efforts were effective. Casual drug use was reduced by 50 percent during the time Reagan headed The Parent Movement, according to the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

JUST SAY NO

In the late 1980s, crack cocaine infiltrated the United States. Teachers felt defenseless in the epidemic because they had too few tools to fight against it.

Enter Nancy Reagan. She encouraged students across the country to "Just Say No." This resulted in schools around the country forming "Just Say No" clubs, where students took pledges to avoid drug use. Reagan was even featured on popular television shows such as Diff'rent Strokes and Dynasty in order to get her message to the masses.



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Taking the Pledge

The Red Ribbon Campaign is about bringing drug awareness to light. If you're wondering how you can do your part in achieving this goal, one of the easiest and most effective ways is to take the pledge.



The rule of the pledge, as set by the Red Ribbon Campaign, is simple: Set guidelines to help children grow up safe, healthy and drug-free.

Below are some ideas from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration on how to effectively follow the pledge for parents and children alike.

IMPORTANCE OF TAKING THE PLEDGE

By taking the pledge and enforcing its message, you're doing your part in securing America's future. You will be making a difference in the lives of the children around you.

Teaching them to make the right decisions and stay drug-free will greatly benefit their futures and keep them on the path to success. You may not be able to stop America's drug problem by yourself, but educating today's youth is taking a step in the right direction.

PLEDGE FOR PARENTS

Here are some of the main facets of the pledge:

Explain the risks. By talking to the youth in your life about the dangers of a life of drugs, you can sway children to make the right choices on staying drug-free.

Set a good example. Children will easily absorb the environment around them. They learn from the behavior to which they are exposed. Be sure to live a clean, drug-free lifestyle yourself to make sure you remain a positive role model.

Consequences. Pay attention to your children's behavior. If you believe your children are considering drug use, enforce clear, strict consequences so they will understand the risk of that type of lifestyle.

PLEDGE FOR CHILDREN

For children, here are some of the main personal characteristics to strive for:

Stay in school. Pledge to remain in school and consider postsecondary education so you can learn important tools that will benefit your decisions in life.

Influence your peers. Pledge to be a good influence on other children your age. If you see someone leaning toward drug-use, seek an adult's advice.

Stay drug-free. While growing up, you may feel the impact of peer pressure. Remember this pledge and how important living drug-free is to your future goals.

Classroom Activities

Are you looking for effective ways to get your classroom active in drug awareness during Red Ribbon Week? Regardless of the age of your pupils, there are many ways to get your students involved in the drug-free movement.


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Whichever activities you choose to incorporate in your school, be sure to choose ones that will create lasting impressions on the children. Having fun while celebrating Red Ribbon Week will help your students appreciate and look forward to this week every October.

BENEFIT FROM THE INTERNET

Whether you are teaching junior or high school students, chances are you have seen them with their nose glued to their smartphones. Take advantage of this by posting positive, drug-free messages on social media sites your students frequent and encourage them to do the same.

Another good way to benefit from today's technology is to use websites like naturalhigh.org. There, you can watch and share videos of celebrities promoting drug-free lifestyles. A message from a student's favorite actor or athlete will likely stick in their mind and can influence future behavior.

CONTESTS

Take a page from National Family Partnership's book and encourage contests for your students. While the NFP gifts cash prizes and iPads for their contests, you don't need such extravagant gifts for the classroom.

Encourage your students to apply for NFP-sponsored contests like the Red Ribbon Photo Contest and creating next year's theme. Consider rewarding students who show the most enthusiasm or creativity with gift cards or trophies.

USE EACH DAY

Most schools use a sprit week to celebrate a sporting event or an upcoming dance. During spirit week, students are encouraged to follow each day's theme. Popular themes are pajama day, school color day and hat day.

Why not create fun themes that incorporate Red Ribbon Week's message? Some unique ideas recommended by the NFP:

Shade Out Drugs Day: Encourage your students to wear sunglasses to symbolize their commitment to staying drug-free.

Decoration Day: Your students can decorate the school in red ribbons and anti-drug messages to take their objective outside the classroom.

Be on a Drug-Free Team Day: Students should wear their favorite team's clothing to create a consistent, positive message.

In Your Community

A good way to get involved with Red Ribbon Week is to engage your community. By beginning your own Red Ribbon Week campaign, you can spread the word of a drug-free environment.

The children in your community can greatly benefit from an organized fight against drugs, and adults can have fun organizing positive events.

Contact your community's elected officials to determine if there is already a campaign you can join. If not, invite those officials to participate in speaking engagements and officially proclaim October 23-31 as Red Ribbon Week.

PAINT THE TOWN RED

To really make your Red Ribbon Week campaign stand out, you should be aware of some of the staples that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency has put into place.

These include asking local businesses to display red ribbons inside and outside their buildings or place a basket full of red ribbons in reception areas. These strategies can make a big impact on customers and patrons who visit the business.

SPONSOR DRUG-FREE EVENTS

Talk to community members to find people who have overcome a struggle with drugs. They can give a first-hand account to youth of how drugs have affected their lives.

Engage with local experts in drug prevention and ask them how you may be able to partner for advocacy or awareness events. The more people you can inform about the risks of drug abuse, the better off your community will be.

JOIN A COALITION

Coalitions are community-focused organizations comprised of dedicated citizens working toward a common goal. There may already be a substance abuse prevention coalition in your neck of the woods. Find out and get involved.

Coalitions are generally funded by grants and have budgets for events or promotional items. They also have officers for marketing, volunteer engagement or budget management. With your unique skillset, you may be able to make a big difference in your community through coalition involvement.



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Parents' Role

As a parent, you have the ability to shape your children into successful, drug-free individuals. By incorporating strict rules and providing your children with a great education on the effects of drugs, you are providing your children with a solid path in life.


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Your children look to you for advice and guidance. A recent study by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) shows that two out of three kids ages 13-17 say they stay away from drugs because they don't want to lose their parents' respect.

The NCADD also released several tips on how you can be a factor in keeping your children off drugs. Let's take a look at a few.

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS BE A FRIEND

As a parent, you are likely the first line of defense in your children's drug-free lifestyle. While being tough on your child may be hard at first, remember that your enforcement may be the difference in your child's decision to not get involved with drugs. Enforcing strict rules for drug use does not make you a bad parent in any way.

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY BEHAVIOR

Keeping your children active will keep them from becoming bored with their everyday life. This boredom may result in them experimenting with drugs. Talk to your community representatives on how to get your children involved in pro-active activities. Some activities may include sporting teams, volunteering or musical endeavors.

BECOME EDUCATED AND SET A GOOD EXAMPLE

You probably already know that using drugs is a bad idea. It can result in serious addictions that may jeopardize your family's financial or emotional well-being. Create a good example for your children by becoming an expert on drug prevention. There are online classes you can take to learn the risks and behaviors that come with drug abuse.

Your children likely look up to you as a role model. Your everyday behaviors will make a big difference in their decisions. Distance yourself from friends who don't take drug-use as seriously as you want your children to. If you're throwing a party, always offer non-alcoholic drinks and refuse to let anyone to drink and drive.

Warning Signs

While you may do everything possible to teach your children about the importance of a drug-free lifestyle, some children still will choose to experiment. It's important to look for warning signs.



By paying attention to your child's behavior, you can become an expert on their personality. This will enable you to take positive, meaningful steps in the right direction if you notice a change in their attitude. If your child starts exhibiting warning signs, it's critical that you step in as soon as possible.

KNOW THE SIGNS

Some of the most noticeable warning signs may still be rather subtle. Here are a few, as outlined by Youth.gov, the U.S. government website focused on helping you create, maintain and strengthen effective youth programs.

Mood changes: If your child is displaying signs of temper flare-ups or defensiveness, this may be a clue that they are experimenting with drug-use.

New friends: Your child may beginning to associate with a different group of people. While this can be completely healthy, it is best to get to know their parents or insist on meeting their new friends.

Lack of motivation: Your child may exhibit unusually poor grades or show a lack of interest in previous hobbies. This may be a good time to check in and see what is causing these sudden changes.

HOW TO CONFRONT YOUR CHILD

If you notice your child exhibiting some of these behaviors, the way you approach the situation can make a difference in the outcome. Rather than just punishing your child without hearing an explanation, make an effort to have them give their side of the story.

These behaviors don't automatically mean drug use. Maybe they are stressed about school or acting out for other reasons. Talk to your child about what may be bothering them and offer your support, regardless of the situation.

HELPING YOUR CHILD

If you witness the warning signs and your child confirms he is experimenting with drugs, what next?

You may begin looking for a doctor to assist in your efforts. Drugabuse.gov has a directory of more than 3,500 physicians in the United States who specialize in addiction. There also are many prevention and treatment agencies offering critical help.

Don't forget your school social worker, teacher and administration. These professionals have an inside look into your child's daily behavior, so be sure to get them involved in the process.