

Parent Tip Sheet

AADAC Youth Services
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What if my teen won't go

AADAC Adult Counselling &

for counselling

Prevention Services
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When children make unhealthy choices it's hard for parents not to say or do anything. As parents we can see how things would be better if our children were not involved with certain friends or risky activities. We can become overly concerned with trying to make our children see or do things our way. When parents accept that they can't change their child, they realize that they have to focus on themselves. They need to change what they are doing that may be making the problem worse. Things like:

- ◆ Covering up for your child's alcohol or other drug use
- ◆ Making excuses for them at school or at work
- ◆ Helping them avoid facing up to their irresponsible behavior
- ◆ Buying into their defenses of minimization and/or rationalization
- ◆ Loaning money to get him/her out of scrapes.

Parents do these things out of love and because we think it will help our children. These efforts are referred to as enabling. Enabling means that the problem is allowed to continue because the child isn't having to face the consequences of his/her actions. If kids don't have to face the consequences of their behaviour, they will never know that their parent's have a problem with what they are doing. Parents hope that if they give it one more chance, things will change. More often the effect is that they help the problem continue. Parents may also enable because they feel guilty. "If only I would have..." or "if only I wouldn't have....this problem wouldn't have happened."

The reality is that alcohol and other drug problems happen in all kinds of families and all family members are affected. Enabling doesn't get rid of the guilt; it only contributes to the problem.

If our children won't take responsibility for their actions, we need to take responsibility for our own. If we are preoccupied with controlling our children's behaviour, we will continue to be frustrated. When we shift our attention to things we can control, (i.e., our own reactions, goals, limits and boundaries), we are able to step back and see ourselves as worthwhile individuals despite what our children are doing.

Setting boundaries is one way to make it clear to our children (and others) about what we will and will not put up with. With clear, firm boundaries parents can stop enabling and separate themselves from their children's crises. Setting boundaries is not easy. It means saying no to requests for money, refusing to make excuses to a teacher or boss, or not allowing kids to be out with friends if curfews are broken. Boundaries make it possible for parents to look after themselves by saying "Enough!". Help from a counsellor may be necessary to get some perspective and to discuss what boundaries are appropriate for you.

Teens who are abusing alcohol or other drugs can be very creative when manipulating parents and others to get what they want. This makes it difficult for parents to be firm. It is important to remember however, that if boundaries aren't maintained and limits and consequences aren't followed

through, families will continue to be in turmoil due to the chaos created by substance abuse. Remember that AADAC is here to help if you have any questions or concerns.