5 Steps to Courageous Parenting

1. Educate:
   While it seems so obvious, it still needs to be said: Talk to your kids about drugs. You are still the single most influential person in your child’s life - use that influence! Here, we recommend a solid balance between the clear dangers of drugs and alcohol coupled with a solid social norms approach.

   First of all, it is important to remember that using alcohol and marijuana are not “rites of passage” and it isn’t just “kids being kids”. Teens who begin using any drugs are FIVE TIMES more likely to become addicted in adulthood. This is sobering. Therefore, it is extremely important to have a zero tolerance policy along with appropriate consequences.

   The reality is, your child will, at some point in their life be confronted with drugs. It can start as “simple” as cigarettes. It is our responsibility as parents to give them the foundation to resist. Teach them the consequences of not saying, “no”. Show them what an addict looks like. It can be impacting and sobering.

   Additional, we know from social norms research (socialnorm.org) and our FL surveys that the vast majority of our students are making smart choices and NOT getting involved with risky behaviors. When students think that ‘everyone is doing it,’ there is real added pressure to participate in risky behaviors. Misperceptions abound in every community. Because things like drugs, alcohol, and sexual behavior are very noteworthy, they are talked about. This may give the impression that many are doing it, when in fact, MOST students are not. As parents it is important to share the dangers while also regularly reminding students that most FL students are making smart decisions and not doing these risky behaviors.

2. Communicate:
   A. Stay in touch with what is happening in your child’s life. This means checking in with them on a regular basis. Care about every aspect of their lives: academics, sports, music, drama, friendships, acne, awkwardness, etc.

   For some personalities (and ages), it can be particularly challenging to get more than a one or two word answer. Sometimes it helps to ask more specific questions or change your approach. Finding common ground can sometimes open up doors to deeper communication. Help your student understand that your questioning is not about you not trusting them, but might be about not trusting other students you do not know, or the situation they want to put themselves in.

   B. Communicate your expectations regularly. Your expectations may be different from the time your 6th grader becomes a senior in high school (i.e. curfew), but think carefully and set high expectations concerning your child’s moral and ethical behavior. Having clear boundaries will help your child avoid certain temptations. When you have clear expectations, boundaries and consequences it helps students know that you understand that they can sometimes be under tremendous pressure and temptation and peer pressure can play very real roles in their decisions, which brings up the next point.....

3. Know Their Friends AND Their Families:
   Make a point to get to know their friends. What are their interests? How do they spend their free time? Along with this, it is equally important to know their friend’s family. What does the family do for activities? We strongly recommend that you call a parent who is hosting a party to ask if there will be alcohol present at a get together. Are they on our “Safe Community Pledge List”? Do they need help for chaperones? Again, remember the social norms perspective. Although your child may likely tell you that, "NOBODY else’s
parents call other parents” don’t believe it. Do the right and safe thing. Call to ensure a safe environment for your child.

Finally, consider YOU being the host parent(s). Let the kids come over to your house for fun things to do. Invite a few other parents as well and model good clean fun.

4. Help Them Know God: (This point stands alone, but is also connected to point #2, Communicate!)

There are many temptations that present themselves to our young people. Obviously as parents, our hope is that they will stand strong and resist. The promise of their future is bright and amazing! So how can we equip them to withstand all that the world would like to throw at them? Well, it begins with a deep foundation of knowing who they are in God. Create an atmosphere in your home of seeking God and putting Him first. Devotions, reading the Bible, and praying together are powerful tools to help your family grow in faith. As a family, get involved in a local church. Regularly communicate with them God’s expectations for Christian living.

5. Don’t Be a Hypocrite:

Practice what you preach! If you go out and party and “dabble” in drugs, it definitely lessens your credibility with your child. The saying, “Do as I say, not as I do.” just doesn’t work. Remember, you are incredibly powerful and influential for good or bad. If you have a history with drugs or alcohol, it isn’t too late. Clean up your act. Show them that anyone can change and make better choices at any age.