Preventing Tobacco Use in Children and Adolescents

Preventing young people from starting to smoke is easier than getting them to stop once they have become addicted to nicotine.

Even though children and adolescents are exposed to many powerful media messages (TV, movies, and music, for example), parents, caregivers, coaches, and other adults can still have great influence.

The August 9, 2000, issue of *JAMA* includes an article that reports that adolescents who lived in smoke-free homes and worked in smoke-free environments were less likely to smoke. Adolescents who had smoked but who lived in smoke-free homes were more likely to report having quit.

Another article in this issue reports on the changes in cigarette use and intentions to use cigarettes among adolescents following the implementation of a tobacco control program. Cigarette use declined and the number of adolescents who reported they would never use cigarettes increased.

It's The Law:
We do not sell tobacco products to persons under 18

SET A GOOD EXAMPLE:

- If you smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products, QUIT
- Do not use tobacco products in the presence of young people
- Encourage other tobacco users who live with a young person to quit
- Talk about the difficulties of quitting
- Share the stories of family members or friends who have died from tobacco use

LAY DOWN THE LAW:

- Set family rules about the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs
- Define clear consequences for breaking the rules
- Enforce the rules you make

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE:

- Let your child know that any problems or concerns can be discussed, including issues about tobacco and drug use
- Listen and remain calm without judgment or anger
- Avoid accusations
- Know the friends of the young persons in your life and know if they use tobacco or other drugs
- Support young people in activities that keep them from tobacco and drug use

TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT TOBACCO USE:

The truth is the best prevention:

- Tobacco is bad for your body
- Tobacco is a drug and is addictive in all forms; chewing tobacco and snuff are just as addictive and harmful as tobacco that is smoked
- Smoking reduces the rate of lung growth
- Smoking increases the risk of lung cancer
- Smoking is a cause of premature death. Each day smoking means less days of life.
- Smoking limits physical fitness and lowers endurance
- Tobacco smoking and chewing are ugly
- Smoking stains your teeth and causes bad breath
- Smoking makes your hair and clothes smell bad
- Chewing tobacco can cause cracked lips, white spots, sores, and bleeding in the mouth
- Tobacco is expensive; a $2.50 pack per day habit adds up to over $900 every year. (Money spent on tobacco could be used for clothes, computer games, movies, music, etc.)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  Tobacco Information and Prevention Source (TIPS)
  or www.cdc.gov/tobacco/
  800/CDC-1311
- American Academy of Pediatrics
  The Risks of Tobacco Use: A Message for Parents and Teens
  www.aap.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm. A previous *JAMA* Patient Page on teen smoking appeared November 3, 1999.

Additional Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics, The AMA Complete Guide to Your Children's Health

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