

What are the rules of a drug home?

## DON'T TALK, DON'T TRUST, & DON'T FEEL

*These are the rules that you must overcome when working in a school setting with the child of a parent who uses, manufactures or sells drugs. The older the child, the more difficult it may be to get the facts from the child. When working with these children, please keep the following things in mind:*

**Life experiences have likely taught the children not to trust adults.**

- Public service systems, including foster care and counseling, are likely familiar to them and will hardly seem like a reasonable solution.
- Drug use and chaos are so much a part of normal it may be hard for these children to relax—even in the safest of places.
- You are in the category of “them” and trust can only be earned through kind, consistent interaction and refusing to enter into verbal conflict with the child. You will never win and they cannot win if you lose.
- Drugs are the social center in a drug home and will be described as morally neutral (not good or bad) by older children even if the bad effects are recognized. It is likely children have used at least one type of drug or alcohol with parents or associates.
- Drug use by the child in this environment means they are a drug endangered child. Punishing a child for something adults control and perhaps forced on them will not work. Children need help but it needs to be offered with a clear recognition of the ways the child has been victimized. Hurt people hurt people; acknowledging hurt is healing.
- Children in drug homes are expected to be the responsible family member without having the life experience to do this effectively.
- Children may be forced to shoplift or do other illegal things in order to avoid rejection by family members. The worst thing you can be in a drug home is a non-drug user.
- Children of drug users may even excel in school thus becoming more invisible in some ways. Using parents may consider them proof that their behavior is not harmful. Remember that emotional wounds can be invisible.
- It is critical to avoid telling a child what you know about their family. Let them know it is safe to talk and that you want what is best for the child as well as their parents.
- Regardless of what parents have done children are a reflection of them. Believing perhaps, “If my parent is worthless then I must also be worthless”. Addicts are out of control because of their decision to use drugs. Make it clear this is no reflection on the child.

How may kids try to keep the secret?

- If you ask what is going on in the family, they may be very vague and talk only about other family members. They may make references to their job or something more positive.
- Kids may act out or get into trouble themselves to detract focus from their parents while also finding a way out of a difficult situation at home. Running away or joining a gang may be examples of this method of coping.
- Keep quiet, isolate and avoid developing friendships. Friendships may only be with children of other users.
- Become a stellar student. The better they perform, the less questions will be asked.

### Why don't kids want to tell you?

- If they tell, everyone will know the secret.
- Their parents may go to jail—you cannot promise they will not.
- They may be forced to enter a foster home. Perhaps the only thing more painful than the neglect and abuse of a drug home is experiencing safety and silence in an unfamiliar place.
- There is nothing scarier than the unknown.
- The worst thing abused children can imagine is the terrible thing that *may* happen—that they are sure *will* happen if they use words to describe what has happened to them and what they have witnessed.
- They are not sure you will understand.
- They are not sure you can fix it.
- They are not sure you care.

### What can you do to help?

Let kids know you care through your actions, not just your words. Know the names of kids—all of them—and use it when you see them. Smile. You never know how many kids see a smile outside of school.

Be patient and present when a child has something to say to you. Bring former foster children or survivors of abuse to your school to share their stories.

**You can help a child know they are not alone.**