

Five Kernels for Raising Healthy Kids



- 1 *Set clear family rules*
- 2 *Reward good choices*
- 3 *Encourage more sleep*
- 4 *Feed their brains Omega-3's*
- 5 *Tell five more families*

These five kernels are taken from an approach called Families United developed by Dr. Dennis Embry of the PAXIS Institute. They are based on research that has demonstrated their effectiveness in reducing teen alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. Dr. Embry describes these kernels in his March 3, 2010 blog at Paxtalk.com as follows:



- 1 **Increasing Positive Family Monitoring.** Children whose parents set clear rules and consequences concerning alcohol, tobacco and other drug use and voice equally clear expectations about their child's friends not using substances as well nor engaging in delinquency or other problem behaviors are much less likely to use. The parents' commitment includes speaking to the child's friends' parents. This clarity and commitment can significantly reduce alcohol, tobacco and other drug use and related delinquency.
- 2 **Rewarding Not Using or Breaking Rules.** Family recognition and reinforcement of children and teens doing the right thing (e.g., not using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs or engaging in deviant behaviors associated with them) has been widely shown to reduce problematic behavior more effectively than punishments. The same procedure can dramatically reduce alcohol, tobacco and other drug use if a child has already started using—based on studies from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Such rewards increased parent-child warmth, key to children's confiding in parents.
- 3 **Reducing Sleep Deprivation.** Ensuring a child has good sleep patterns, by limiting access to electronic media before bedtime and other times, has multiple positive effects on risk and protective factors associated with alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, school success, family relationships, mental health, aggression and obesity. Indeed, just simple advice about this from a child's doctor works.
- 4 **Changing Fatty Acid Ratios in a Child's Diet.** Based on extensive data, the National Institute on Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse reported through the Institute of Medicine's Report on the Prevention of Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, that increasing children's "brain food" (omega-3 found in fish oil) and reducing omega-6 found in processed foods protects a child's basic brain function, brain receptors and brain chemistry from the risk of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use as well as other problematic behaviors including depression, aggression and suicide.
- 5 **Increasing Parent Networking Among the Families of Children's Friends.** Sharing and communicating the previous four prevention kernels with five of the parents of one's child's friends fosters a community norm—strengthening and reinforcing these protective factors by all families to benefit all children in the community. Such simple but effective action provides a population-level public health and safety benefit.