



EMPOWERING PARENTS TO RAISE
THEIR CHILDREN TO BE SUBSTANCE-FREE

Talk Early And Often About Alcohol, Tobacco And Other Drugs. Even When It Gets Tough

Know! To Seize The Teachable Moment

Our children are surrounded by alcohol and other drug-related messages on a regular and ongoing basis. The good news is, it is possible to turn these high-risk, harmful messages into positive lessons. When such an opportunity presents itself, you are encouraged to take hold and seize the Teachable Moment.

Jelly Belly Candy Company, makers of the world famous jelly beans, recently served up one of these teachable moment opportunities. Aside from their 50 official flavors, they have rookie flavors like Orange and Grape Crush and offer special edition packages featuring characters like Harry Potter, Hello Kitty and Mickey Mouse – which makes sense, as these treats are a favorite among children of all ages. But recently they expanded their variety of alcohol-flavored beans, which already included flavors like peach bellini, pomegranate cosmo, margarita and mojito. The new flavor? *Draft Beer*, which the company proudly promotes as the world's first beer-flavored jelly bean, "with a jewel-like finish for a fresh from the tap 'bubbly' look."

On the surface, alcohol-flavored candy like these, may not seem like a huge deal. But think about it for a minute and realize the unconscious message being sent to our children.

"Alcohol-flavored jelly beans are no big deal if my six-year-old sister is allowed to eat them. My friends think it's funny to bring beer-flavored candy to school. Plus, I like the taste of these jelly beans. And if this is what alcohol tastes like, then I would probably like it too. They say beer is an acquired taste? Well, I can acquire it a lot earlier now."

Those of us of a certain age may remember the bubble blowing pipes and candy cigarettes that allowed kids to imitate adult tobacco users. It was realized that such products desensitized children, leading some to become tobacco users later in life, and were removed from stores where children frequent.

Sadly, our children are growing up at a time when pop culture seems to be promoting and encouraging alcohol and other drug use more than ever, which in turn, desensitizes and normalizes these high-risk behaviors. Toys R Us was recently guilty of playing into this when they made the decision to sell *Breaking Bad* action figures complete with detachable gun, cash and crystal meth. Fortunately, Toys R Us pulled these "toys" from their shelves after a national outcry from parents.

So when you and your child see *Draft Beer Jelly Belly* jelly beans in the store, or a toy or game that promotes alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or hear a song on the radio glamorizing use - see it as a prime opportunity to create a much-needed filter for your child and seize that Teachable Moment!

Teachable moments help make unconscious messages conscious; provide an opportunity to reinforce your attitudes, values and expectations; and strengthen your child's low-risk attitudes and behaviors.

When utilizing a teachable moment, keep these tips in mind:

- Teachable moments work best when kept short and to the point;
- They are not effective in moments of anger or resentment between parent and child;
- The message will need to be revisited and repeated in order to inform, persuade and reinforce;
- Be mindful of your tone and choice of words - how you say it is as important as what you say
- Keep it relevant and timely - take advantage of instances when a topic catches your child's attention. If you need more info, research and then revisit your chat (but do it sooner than later).

Parents are powerful. You are encouraged to use your parent power to take advantage of alcohol and other drug-related teachable moments. By doing so, you will help your child develop critical communication skills so that he/she becomes more resistant to the power of the unconscious message.

Source: Prevention Research Institute (adapted from): *Teachable Moments: A Parent's Best Friend*.

Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

Know! encourages you to share this Parent Tip with friends and family.

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