

PARENT TALK KIT

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT PERFORMANCE ENHANCING SUBSTANCES

We all know that drugs like cocaine, heroin and crystal meth are incredibly dangerous. But, when it comes to performance enhancing substances (PES), young athletes aren't always quite sure what to think. Unlike hard drugs, PES don't seem to be all that harmful or addictive. PES offer the allure of strength, bulk and speed—and with that, glory, awards and recognition. In addition, young athletes often aspire to emulate the glamorous lifestyle of athletic superstars—the money, endorsements and adoring fans. It all sounds good until the athlete faces the very real negative health consequences—or gets caught.

But, as medical evidence and news reports make clear: PES should have absolutely no place in athletics—professional, college, youth sports or otherwise. Using performance enhancing drugs to get ahead in sports is, quite simply, cheating. And more importantly, PES are extremely dangerous. Adolescents who abuse steroids and other illegal supplements can have stunted growth, develop traits characteristic of the opposite gender, and become highly aggressive. PES have also been linked to every side effect imaginable, from dizziness to severe chest pain to sudden death.

“THERE'S NO WAY THE PEOPLE WHO ARE TAKING PERFORMANCE ENHANCING SUBSTANCES CAN GO TO SLEEP AT NIGHT AND THINK THEY'VE REALLY ACHIEVED SOMETHING.”

—John Celestand, Announcer for ESPN Regional and SportsNet and a player for the LA Lakers from 1999-2000



It can be challenging to keep your kids healthy, safe and playing fair—so what's a parent to do? It's simple—use the following three steps:

- 1. Get involved.**
- 2. Stay connected.**
- 3. Talk.**

Bringing up the topic of PES—with your teenager or anyone else—can be awkward, uncomfortable or just plain hard to do. So we spoke to a panel of coaches, educators, athletes, and, most importantly, other parents to get valuable tips and information that will help you get the conversation started today!

THE PANEL

LINN GOLDBERG, M.D.

LOCATION Portland

ROLE Professor of Medicine and Head of the Division of Health Promotion and Sports Medicine at Oregon Health & Science University; father

WILLIAM O. ROBERTS, M.D.

LOCATION Minnesota

ROLE Past president of the American College of Sports Medicine and Professor of Family Medicine at the University of Minnesota; father

KAREN PINETTE

LOCATION Reading, MA

ROLE Mother of 3 boys who all played multiple sports and were wrestling captains in high school

BOB CARUSO

LOCATION New Jersey

ROLE Teen basketball coach; father

CHARLES WHITAKER

LOCATION Oak Park, IL

ROLE Father of 2 teen boys

JOHN CELESTAND

LOCATION New Jersey

ROLE Announcer for ESPN Regional and SportsNet and a player for the LA Lakers from 1999-2000



“PES are pro-social drugs. They’re not used to drop out of society. You use them, perform, and then get the cheers and get the money. If you use heroin, nobody is going to clap for you. If you use steroids and just show up and hit a homerun or do better than you did before, people clap for you—there’s immediate positive feedback.”

—Linn Goldberg, M.D., Professor of Medicine and Head of the Division of Health Promotion and Sports Medicine at Oregon Health & Science University

STEP 1: GET INVOLVED

Before you panic about PES, remember that having sports-obsessed kids is usually a good thing! High school athletics gave Karen Pinette's boys something to be constantly involved with so that "they didn't have time to do something they shouldn't have been doing." Furthermore, Pinette says that her kids' wrestling coach was an incredibly positive influence on her boys. "They quote him all the time—'hard work makes dreams come true.'"

Organized sports keep your teen occupied and motivated, let her work off that excess energy, and most importantly, teach her life lessons both on and off the field. But it's up to you as a parent to pay close and constant attention to your athletic child. Staying involved will help you make sure that your teen is participating in sports in a safe, fair and healthy manner.

HERE ARE 8 TIPS FOR HELPING TEEN ATHLETES STAY ON THE RIGHT TRACK:

- 1. Stay aware of new pressures.** "Because college is so competitive to get into, students look for every edge they can find," says Pinette. Dr. William Roberts adds that trying out for a sport as a high-school freshman can also be very stressful. "Younger kids want to secure a spot on a team in order to fit in at a new school," Roberts says. What can you do? Recognize when and why your teen is stressed, and help him figure out healthy ways to overcome the problems he's worried about.
- 2. Get back to basics.** Bob Caruso says that sports, in their purest form, are "all about discipline and responsibility and respect." Remind your teen that athletics are truly about working hard, pushing your natural limits, being part of a team, and showing respect to your competitors. "If we can get that message across and build self-esteem, that goes a long way to helping the kids make the important decisions about using or not using," says Caruso.

- 3. Give options.** Their brains are still developing (for more on this, visit www.drugfree.org) so teenagers often have poor planning and judgement (rarely thinking of negative consequences). If your young athlete is trying to bulk up, remind him of the long-term consequences of using PES and explain that there are plenty of healthy ways to increase muscle without taking drugs. Suggest weight training during the off-season, eating a balanced diet, or cross-training with other sports or exercises such as yoga to stay flexible and strong.

And remember—because the teen body is still growing and maturing, your child can only get so big and so buff. The human body simply has limits! Make sure your teen understands that even if she does everything she can for her body, she will probably still not be as strong as older kids—and that's okay.



STEP 1: GET INVOLVED *(continued from previous page)*

4. Monitor use of supplements or shakes.

“I kept a very close eye on my oldest because he was big, but his weight went in progression,” Pinette says. “He did take protein drinks and things like that, but we monitored—and kept him in close contact with our family physician.” Many shakes and supplements contain traces of drugs that have not yet been tested on adolescents, and that may get kids kicked off teams if found in a urine test. Pinette suggests that you keep a close eye on the protein drink ingredient lists so that you know that no illegal or dangerous substances are being consumed.

5. **Just ask.** There’s no need to guess your teen’s attitude about or history with PES. Just ask her! “I always found that the best time to talk to my kids about drugs was when driving the car and I had the kids in the back seat,” says Roberts. You can also bring up the topic while eating dinner or watching television. And if your teen brings up PES first, don’t let the opportunity pass you by! Pinette explains, “If one of my boys sees someone on TV and says, ‘He must be on ‘roids’—we say, ‘Why would you think that?’ Then we discuss why you wouldn’t want to do that to your body.”

6. **Counter pro-drug messages.** Whether you like it or not, messages that say “PES are great!” and “Steroid users are cool!” are constantly directed towards your teen. “Because of the way advertisers use the term ‘on steroids,’ it’s perceived to be not that big of a problem,” says Dr. Linn Goldberg. “There are a lot of ads out there that say ‘on steroids’ as being good for their product.” Make sure that when you and your teen see an advertisement portraying PES in a good light, you give your kid the facts.

7. **Learn more.** Make sure you’re knowledgeable about PES so that you can be specific and credible when you talk to your teen. Do your research on steroids and other drugs at www.drugfree.org. Then share what you’ve learned with your kids!

8. **Keep at it.** “Parenting is one percent luck and ninety-nine percent hard work,” says Pinette. “It’s about staying involved and being annoying—but it pays off.”



STEP 2: STAY CONNECTED

Your teen's coach is much more than just someone who runs practices and calls plays. He or she is the person who observes, talks to and teaches your kid for hours or more each day! He or she is also the person who will be first to notice changes in your teen's athletic abilities, appearance and behavior if your teen starts using drugs. When is the last time you checked in with your child's coach? If it's been a while, consider making a call to see how things are going.

Partner with your kid's coach—and other caring adults in your child's life—to help guide your child to a healthy future. "It takes a coach. It takes the parents. It takes the teachers in school. Even the security people at school or the janitors—they know these kids and they know where they hang out. That cumulative effect makes a difference," says Bob Caruso.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU CREATE A STRONG PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD'S COACH:

- 1. Get to know the team rules.** Caruso's team has a code of conduct that both the parents and the kids must agree to follow. The code outlines requirements that the teen show up for practices and games, remain committed to school and maintain a certain grade point average, and pledge that he won't use any drugs, alcohol or tobacco.
- 2. Fill the coach in.** "If it involves your son's life, including grades or mental or physical well-being, we want to know about it," says Caruso. "I appreciate when a parent comes to me and says, 'Here's what's going on with my son.'"
- 3. Respect his/her role as coach.** You want to forge a relationship with the coach for your teen's health and safety—not so you can have a say in play-making. You may think that coaches don't want to hear from parents, but that's usually because some parents pass judgment on team strategy or coaching decisions. Charles Whitaker explains, "I think coaches are fairly receptive to parents who aren't trying to coach, but are saying, 'We'd like more information on this.'"
- 4. Time your talk.** Don't approach the coach before or after a game, as those are very emotional times. Talk to him or her before or after practices or on the phone.



STEP 3: TALK

The bottom line: “In order to keep young athletes drugfree, “parents have to talk to their kids, as uncomfortable as it is,” says Roberts. “Ask them if they’re using. Ask them if they’re thinking about using. Ask them if their friends are using anything.”

Listen to what your child has to say, and then impart your knowledge and feelings on the subject in an understanding but firm manner. Make sure your teen knows that you’re aware of how unfortunately competitive youth sports are today, but that you are 100 percent sure that the negatives outweigh the good when it comes to performance enhancing substances.

IF YOU’RE STILL UNSURE EXACTLY HOW TO APPROACH THE TOPIC, HERE ARE SOME DIFFERENT ANGLES YOU CAN USE.

TOPIC TO APPROACH	CONVERSATION STARTER
<p>Your Health Comes First. “The short-term effects of PES use—bulking up, making the team—are so enticing that many teens forget to think about (or don’t realize that there are) serious health risks and long-term consequences. Performance enhancing substances can cause everything from dizziness and nausea to stunted growth and development to a heart attack, which can lead to death. If your child seems swayed by glamorized PES use in the media and pro sports, remind him that his health is the most valuable thing he has—and that good health is much more important than looks or athletic ability.</p>	<p>→ “I know it’s hard to play in a league where so many of the kids are bigger than you, and I’m sure that right now, steroids or other drugs must look like a great solution. But performance enhancing substances can cause you many serious problems—physical and mental—and I love you too much to see anything happen to you. Do you know about any of the health risks associated with PES? They aren’t worth it, right?”</p>
<p>Use the news. We’ve all heard the stories. Olympic athletes stripped of their medals because of doping. Pro athletes whose greatest accomplishments are called into question because of possible PES use. If, unfortunately, an athlete makes headlines for drug use in the future, use the news as a way to reinforce your no-use message and to find out what your child thinks about PES.</p>	<p>→ “Playing pro sports must be quite the pressure cooker. One bad season and you’re out. It’s probably really tempting to use performance enhancing substances. But a lot of athletes don’t do it. I’ve heard [name an athlete] is completely dedicated to working out and eating healthy. Right? What do you think is going to happen to [insert name of athlete]? And does any of that stuff go on at your school?”</p>
<p>No shortcuts. “Using performance enhancing substances is cheating,” states John Celestand. He recommends that parents consistently reinforce the message that cheating and shortcuts never pay off—in sports, school and beyond. “You can’t get away with taking shortcuts in life. The people who make it in life are the people who put in the work. When you take shortcuts, you only cheat yourself.”</p>	<p>→ “Cheating in sports is absolutely no different than cheating in school. If you were to cheat on a test, I would be angry, your teacher would punish you, and you wouldn’t even feel good about yourself, because you’d know that you didn’t earn the grade. If you ever decide to take steroids, it’ll be the same situation—I’ll be disappointed in you, you’ll always know that you cheated, and you may even get kicked off the team.”</p>

WINNERS ON AND OFF THE FIELD

It's very possible for your child to excel in and enjoy sports without using performance enhancing substances. But it's not enough for you to know this—make sure your teen does as well. Encourage healthy living, emphasize the importance of a good attitude, and constantly remind your kid that as long as she plays safely and fair, you'll always be proud of her. One of the keys to avoiding PES is constantly keeping in mind that sports are meant to be fun!

TALK TO THE DOC

If you're worried that your child is using PES but you can't get him or her to admit it, turn to your family doctor for help. Before taking your teen in for a check-up, call the doctor and ask her to address the issue during the exam. Keep in mind: even if the doctor does find something out, he can't always pass it along because of confidentiality issues. "If I find something out about a kid that isn't life-threatening and then I break that confidence, I'll never hear from the kid again," says Roberts. "I try to get them to talk to their parents about it so they can move ahead from there."



If you discover that your child has a drug problem, do not be ashamed to seek outside help! For more information on who and how to ask for help, visit www.drugfree.org.

WHEN TO WATCH

While there are no guarantees about who uses—and who doesn't—Roberts says the riskiest years are when kids are first trying to make the team. Younger kids who want to secure a spot on a team and fit in at a new school often don't have the size or skills they need to go up against older kids. "I think the average kid who is in sports for fun and doing reasonably well isn't so much at-risk as the kid who is highly motivated to be better, highly motivated to make the team, but doesn't have the size or the skills," says Roberts. Keep watch over your teen during the pre-season, when tryouts take place.

Some PES make people bulk up. Others help them lose weight. And some cause few visible physical changes at all. But there are signs you can watch out for. "Using these performance enhancing substances is kind of like hyperadolescence," says Goldberg. Physical and emotional signs parents should look for:

- **Rapid changes in body shape**
- **Aggressive behavior or mood swings that go beyond normal teen behavior**
- **Problems with friends**
- **Extreme hair growth or acne**
- **Excessive time spent in the weight room**
- **Voice changes (especially for girls)**

IF THEY'RE USING

If you find out your child has used or is using performance enhancing substances, take action immediately. Conversation is still one of the best tools you can use to get him or her back on the track to good health. But, before you talk to your teen, take a breath and collect yourself. You need to stay in control during the conversation.

CONVERSATION STARTER

"I'm really upset that you're using drugs. I need to get a handle on how often this has been happening and what your experiences are. I get that you're worried about being in trouble, but the worst part of it's over—I now know you're using. The best thing you can do now is really be straight with me. So for starters, tell me what you've been doing and how often you've been doing it."