**Nursing Notes**



Preventing Youth Substance Abuse

Think of a teenager’s brain like a new car. It has a fantastic gas pedal. But the brakes haven’t been installed yet.

The brain isn’t fully developed until around age 25 – specifically the part that manages logical reasoning and impulse control.

In high emotion, high peer pressure situations like a party where people are drinking alcohol or using drugs, the “gas pedal” can easily overwhelm the developing brakes, resulting in less than thoughtful decision making.

Help your child make thoughtful decisions by talking through scenarios in advance.

Make clear rules and stick to them. Consider rewards for following the rules.

They are listening, even if they don’t let you know. Talks can be short, but make it clear to your children what you expect from them.

Be prepared to answer questions about your smoking, drinking or medicine use. You do not have to give information you’re not comfortable sharing. Try to stay focused on them. Some ways to answer might be, “We’re talking about you, and I want to help you be safe,” or “Everybody makes mistakes. I want to keep you from making a bad choice.”

Keep your home safe by removing or locking up prescription drugs, tobacco and alcohol products.

More tips, facts and resource links are available at www.mass.gov/parentpower

*Some information adapted for all ages from “Talking to your middle school-aged child about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.”*