



Tactful Tactics To Temper Teen Smoking

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To discourage teen smoking, use three tactics: start early, don't nag and "get them thinking."

"Never, never nag," says Dr. Larry Laufman, a cancer-control education specialist at Baylor College of Medicine. "Harrassment is a sure-fire way to keep them smoking."

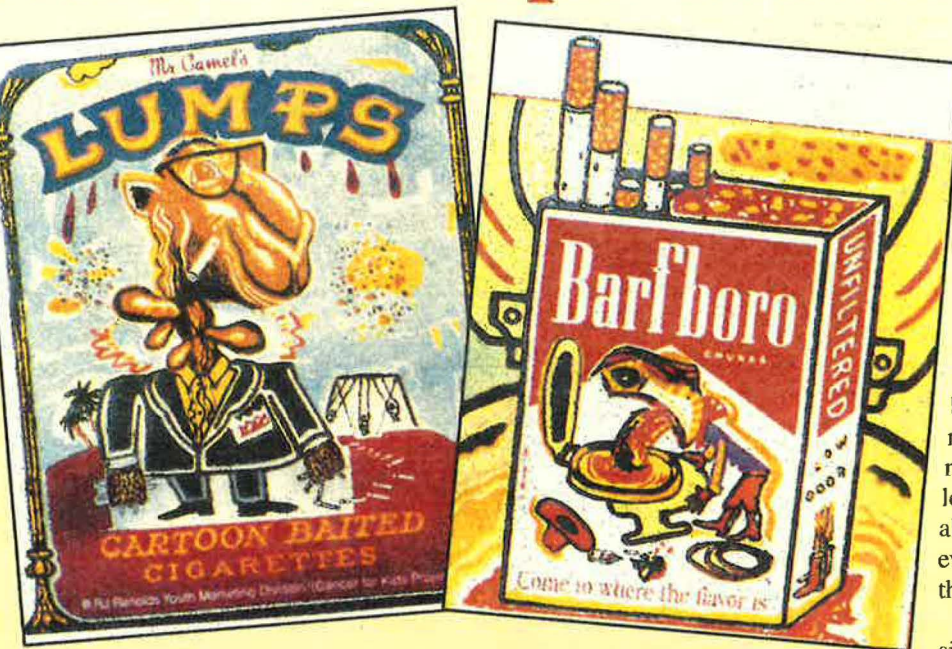
Others agree. Baylor physicians Dr. Rebecca Hill, an adolescent medicine specialist, and Dr. Alan Blum, a family physician, both believe that if teenagers have their minds firmly set to smoke, it is difficult to dissuade them.

"You cannot make people do something they do not want to do," Dr. Hill says. Dr. Blum feels even stronger, believing that success can be further hampered by the influences of tobacco advertising.

All agree, however, that parents can begin early to get across the message about smoking's dangers. Dr. Hill advocates a family environment that encourages open discussion.

"That may not stop them from smoking, but it will pave the way for honest talk when the time comes," she says.

Dr. Laufman says to build teen self-



The national organization DOCS (Doctors Ought To Care) has developed a colorful array of posters designed to get teenagers to stop smoking. (Courtesy of DOCS)

esteem, reward success throughout life instead of punishing failure.

"With the tremendous peer pressure to smoke, self-esteem is crucial," he says. "Parents should reward success, not punish failure. This builds the ability to say 'I can do it'."

Dr. Blum believes parents can take steps when children are young to "poke fun" at the whole idea of smoking.

"We should let them know just how silly smoking looks," he says. "If they see smoking as something 'uncool,' it may help." Dr. Blum, Dr. Hill and Dr. Laufman concur with statistics that show children of smokers are more likely to smoke.

When teens smoke, parents may feel helpless, but parents can let teens know that while they cannot control smoking,

they can control smoking in the house and car, Dr. Hill says. Also, be aware of the teen's nature.

"If their child is someone who runs left when they say right, then it may seem impossible to dissuade them. But if their child responds to frank talk, then it's worth a try."

Dr. Laufman says the "contemplation ladder" may also help.

"It's a behavior modification tool in which you get people to change behavior by moving up a ladder one rung at a time," he explains. "The first rung is 'not thinking' about their problem. The second rung is 'thinking about their problem.' From there, they eventually move from thinking about the problem to action."

"To get them thinking may be as simple as a serious discussion or having them read a brochure," he says. "Even if the seed is only planted, it's a start."

Dr. Blum advocates parental involvement by influencing tobacco companies, government officials and lawmakers to prevent tobacco companies from targeting younger smokers.

One thing on which all three agree: anticipate the problem and when it occurs, don't ignore it.