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Dear Parent:

My Health Rock website was conceived to help parents and children learn about health issues in a fun, educational way. To facilitate your discussions, I put together this page of information.

DocRock™

SMOKING STINKS!

Everybody knows that smoking or chewing **tobacco** (tuh-BA-ko) is bad for you and is the leading cause of preventable deaths each year. Unfortunately, 46 million people in the United States smoke about 420 billion cigarettes every year. Approximately 90 percent of smokers start smoking between the ages of 12 and 17. Every day 1,200 people die from smoking and every day 4,400 kids start smoking regularly. Teaching kids about the dangers of smoking helps them to make good decisions about smoking and chewing tobacco.

Why do children start smoking?

There are a lot of reasons. Some kids are curious. Others start smoking because they like doing something dangerous. Some kids smoke because their parents do not want them to. There are some kids who think that smoking makes them look cool or feel independent. Growing up around smokers can also lead to children believing that smoking is part of being an adult. Mothers who smoke when they are pregnant are more likely to have kids who smoke because chemicals in the cigarettes get into the babies brains while they are still in their mothers. Many kids know that smoking can make them sick, but they start smoking any way because it's hard to think about a disease that may not happen for many years into the future. One thing's for sure; there is no good reason for anyone to start smoking.

Why is tobacco bad for your health?

There are two main reasons: 1) it is addictive and 2) it contains poisonous chemicals. Tobacco contains a chemical called **nicotine** (NIH-kuh-teen). It is very addictive and can get a person "hooked" within just a couple of days from the first time they try it. Nicotine causes people to have a short-lived "good feeling" . After a while, a person will need nicotine just to feel normal. Smoking tobacco can cause certain long-term health

problems including **bronchitis, emphysema, cancer, and heart disease**. 1,200 people a day die due to health problems caused by smoking. Some of the short-term health problems caused by smoking or chewing tobacco include coughing, throat irritation, increased heart rate and blood pressure,

In addition, there is some research to support that individuals that smoke are more likely to experiment with other drugs including marijuana, cocaine, and heroine.

Why else is smoking bad for you?

Many children cannot relate or think about the effects that smoking may have on them too far into the future; however those are not the only bad effects that smoking will have on your children. People that smoke will experience **bad breath, yellow teeth, stinky clothing, an increase in the number of colds, and short of breath**.

In addition, the habit of smoking can become an expensive habit with a package of cigarettes costing approximately \$6. One pack a day will cost you over \$2,000 each year.

How do I talk to my children about not smoking?

Parents have the biggest influence on their children and are the most likely to prevent them from smoking. Keep telling kids about the risks of smoking. Here are some things that may help:

- Encourage kids to do activities that do not allow smoking such as sports
- Keep talking over the years about the harmful effects that smoking has on the body. One talk won't be enough. It is never too early to start discussing the risks.
- Teach your child how to battle peer pressure to smoke. Provide them with acceptable answers so they can feel confident saying "no."
- Encourage your child to become friends with people that do not smoke and to leave friends that do not accept their reasons for not smoking.
- Make rules against smoking or chewing tobacco in your house and explain why.

How do I know if my child smokes?

Kids who smoke often have clothes that smell like smoke. Sometimes the smell might just be from hanging around friends that smoke or maybe they just tried it one time. Here are some other signs:

- Bad breath
- Stained teeth or clothing
- Hoarseness
- Coughing
- Get tired easily
- Shortness of breath
- More colds

What do I do if my child does smoke?

There are lots of ways. Yelling and lecturing usually don't work. A good approach is giving them information and support to make the right decision to quit smoking.

- Ask what they like about smoking.
- Discuss the negative things happening now – less spending money, bad breath, yellow teeth, stinky clothing. Talk about the future – cancer and heart disease are harder to imagine than smelling bad, doing poorly at sports for being short of breath, and costing them a lot of money.
- Work together with their doctor to make a plan to quit and stay positive along the way.
- You can't make a person quit smoking – they have to want to. Give them information and work with their health provider to make a proper decision.
- Keep the rules you set up about not smoking at home.
- Meet with the family physician, who can give additional resources and support.

How do I talk about smoking with my child if I smoke?

It's hard to tell your child not to smoke when you do, but you have to. It's OK to say that you made the wrong choice when you started smoking and that if you could do it all over again you would never start smoking. It helps if you quit smoking. It's not easy, but being a good example can help your child not smoke, or quit if they do. You might enjoy listening to the HealthRock® song *Quit Smoking* or *I'm Not Smoking Cigarettes*.