

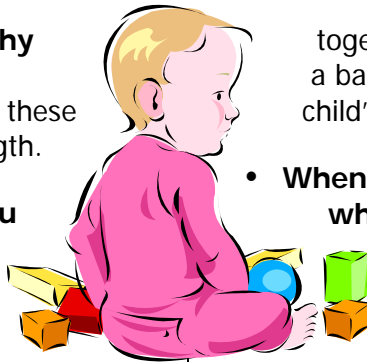
Prevention for Preschool Children

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

It may seem premature to talk about drugs with preschoolers, but the attitudes and habits that they form at this age have an important bearing on the decisions they will make when they're older. At this early age, they are eager to know and memorize rules, and they want your opinion on what's "bad" and what's "good." Although they are old enough to understand that smoking is bad for them, they're not ready to take in complex facts about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Nevertheless, this is a good time to practice the decision-making and problem-solving skills that they will need to say "no" later on.

Here Are Some Ways To Help Your Preschool Children Make Good Decisions About What Should And Should Not Go Into Their Bodies:

- **Discuss why children need healthy food.** Have your child name several favorite good foods and explain how these foods contribute to health and strength.
- **Set aside regular times when you can give your son or daughter your full attention.** Get on the floor and play with him; learn about her likes and dislikes; let him know that you love him; say that she's too wonderful and unique to do drugs. You'll build strong bonds of trust and affection that will make turning away from drugs easier in the years to come.
- **Provide guidelines** like playing fair, sharing toys, and telling the truth so children know what kind of behavior you expect from them.
- **Encourage your child to follow instructions, and to ask questions** if he does not understand the instructions.
- **When your child becomes frustrated at play, use the opportunity to strengthen problem-solving skills.** For example, if a tower of blocks keeps collapsing, work



together to find possible solutions. Turning a bad situation into a success reinforces a child's self-confidence.

- **Whenever possible, let your child choose what to wear.** Even if the clothes don't quite match, you are reinforcing your child's ability to make decisions.
- **Point out poisonous and harmful substances commonly found in homes,** such as bleach, kitchen cleanser, and furniture polish, and read the products' warning labels out loud. Explain to your children that not all "bad" drugs have warnings on them, so they should only eat or smell food or a prescribed medicine that you, a grandparent, or babysitter, give them.
- **Explain that prescription medications are drugs that can help** the person for whom they are meant but that can harm anyone else – especially children, who must stay away from them.

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QUESTIONS CHILDREN FREQUENTLY ASK ABOUT DRUGS

Q. Why would people want to put bad things into their bodies?

A. One answer might be that they might not realize how dangerous the bad things are; another is that they are not taking care of themselves. Sometimes people start using a drug just to see what it feels like, but it can turn into an addiction (like cigarettes) and it's very hard to stop.



Q. Why are some drugs good for you and some drugs wrong for you to take?



A. You can discuss how drugs are powerful chemicals that change the way you feel. Doctors prescribe medicine to make sick people better - these are "good" drugs. "Bad" drugs are ones that aren't given by doctors and don't make you better; in fact, they can harm your body. That is why it is wrong to take these "bad" drugs.

Q. Why can't I taste that "grown-up" drink?

A. A smaller amount of alcohol has a much greater negative effect on a child's body than on an adult's; even a small amount can sicken a child.



Q. Did you smoke marijuana when you were young?

A. Don't give your child more information than necessary. If the answer is "yes," give the reasons why you feel you made a mistake; for instance, it made you feel out of control, you missed schoolwork, messed up in sports, let down your friends or lost touch with them. Also explain that more is known about the harmful effects of marijuana and other drugs now.



Information Provided by:

Growing Up Drug-Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention, 1998

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