

TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD
About
Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs

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

TEACHING THE FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND OTHER DRUG USE

Some children think that **everybody** drinks, smokes, or uses other drugs, when the fact is *most people do not use drugs*. It is important to help your child understand the dangers of alcohol and drug use. You can show your child the devastating effects of substance abuse in many ways. Take your child to a local treatment center, visit a police station and talk to the police officers, or read books and watch videos on drugs and substance abuse prevention.

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CHILD

Talking is only half the job. You should learn to *listen* to your child. You can keep the lines of communication open by knowing how and when to listen. Also, encourage your children to tell you about problems they may be having and to ask you for help.

Some ways to do this include:

- Rephrasing your child's comments to indicate that you have understood.
- Giving nonverbal support and encouragement by nodding and smiling.
- Using a caring tone of voice to answer a child.
- Using encouraging phrases to express interest and to keep the conversation going.

HELPING AND SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

♥ Help Your Child Develop Self-Esteem

Children feel good when parents praise their efforts and accomplishments, and when parents correct by criticizing the action rather than the child. Preteens and adolescents are often unsure of themselves. Knowing their parents have confidence in them means a great deal to children. You can communicate faith in your child by giving lots of specific and believable praise and encouragement at appropriate times.

Most importantly, tell your children you love them.



♥ Help Your Child Develop Strong Values

A strong value system can give your child the courage to refuse drugs, rather than listen to friends who might pressure them into taking drugs. By the time children are nine years old, they are old enough to know what behaviors are right and wrong and to make decisions based on standards that are important to them. If they have a clear sense of right and wrong, children can make decisions based on facts and sound values rather than on pressure from other children.

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♥ Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure

Teach your children the value of individuality. Not everyone has to go along with the crowd and real friends do not base friendship on whether a person is willing to try drugs. Help them to practice ways they can say “no” and feel confident about themselves and their decision. Even though young people often report that they learn more from friends when they reach adolescence, studies have found that these same adolescents would prefer to learn about a variety of important topics from their parents or other caring adults. Peer influence does increase during the teen years, but the influence of caring adults can remain strong if you’ve established a strong relationship during the earlier years.



♥ Be A Good Role Model

If you use alcohol, tobacco products, or illicit drugs, your children are more likely to use them too. Parental habits and attitudes influence children’s ideas about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Your child is very aware of your habits and spoken and unspoken attitudes concerning alcohol and drug use.

♥ Establish Rules For Your Child

It is important to set clear family rules against alcohol and drug use. Tell your children they are not allowed to drink, smoke, use other drugs, or engage in activities to which you object. Be sure they thoroughly understand the consequences of breaking these rules and enforce them consistently. Children want more structure in their lives than is commonly believed and they behave more responsibly when parents set limits.

♥ Encourage Your Child To Participate In Creative Activities

Hobbies, school events, and other activities may help prevent drug use that develops out of boredom. Create activities for your children and join them in having fun whenever possible. Surveys show children appreciate the time parents spend with them even if doing chores is involved. Make sure your children have enough structure in their daily lives and try to reduce their stress.



JOINING TOGETHER WITH OTHER PARENTS

Other parents are dealing with the same issues. Team up with your peers in support groups to reinforce the guidance you provide at home. Networking with neighborhood parents and community groups can help. Meet with school administrators to discuss the school’s alcohol and drug use policy. If your child is going to a party or getting together with friends, make sure they will be chaperoned by an adult and that no alcohol or other drugs will be served. Form a parents committee to host alcohol and drug-free activities.

IF YOU SUSPECT A PROBLEM

Watch for verbal and visual signs that your children are experiencing difficulties in school, having troubles with peers, or suffering from depression. Learn to recognize the telltale signs of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use so you can seek immediate and appropriate help for your child from a medical or substance abuse professional.

If you think your child is using drugs

Express concern and provide help rather than accusing your child.

Explain why you are concerned and be your child’s ally in getting help.