

# Talking With A Child About Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs



- Parents can start talking with their children about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs when they are young.
- Research shows that kids listen to their parents. Children who learn about alcohol, tobacco, and drug risks from their parents are less likely to start using these substances.
- Parents can use everyday events as opportunities to talk with their children. They can encourage their child to ask questions.
- Parents should teach their child the facts about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. Kids who know the facts are more likely to make good choices.

## When Should A Parent Start Talking With Their Child?

Parents are encouraged to start early. By preschool, most children have seen adults smoking cigarettes, vaping or drinking alcohol, either in real life, on TV, or online.

Parents can make sure their child knows right from the start that they think it's important to stay safe and avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Here are more reasons to start the conversation early:

- Almost 9 out of 10 smokers start smoking or vaping before they turn 18.
- By the time they are in 8th grade, most children think that using alcohol is okay.
- At age 12 or 13, some kids are already using drugs like marijuana or prescription pain relievers.

## What If A Child Is Older?

It's never too late to start the conversation about avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Even if the teen may have tried one or more of these substances, parents can still talk about making healthy choices and how to say "no" next time.

## Why Do Parents Need To Talk To Their Child?

Research shows that kids do listen to their parents. Children who learn about alcohol, tobacco, and drug risks from their parents are less likely to start using these substances.

When kids choose not to use alcohol or drugs, they are also less likely to:

- Have serious trouble in school
- Get hurt in a car accident
- Be a victim of crime
- Have a problem with addiction as an adult

If parents don't talk about it, their child may think it's okay to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

## Parents Are Encouraged To Talk With Their Child Early and Often

Parents are encouraged to start conversations about their values and expectations while their child is young. Their child will get used to sharing information and opinions with them. This will make it easier for parents to continue talking as their child gets older. Here are some tips :

- Parents can use everyday events to start a conversation. For example, if they see a group of kids smoking or vaping, they can talk about how tobacco harms the body.
- Parents will want to give their child their full attention. They can demonstrate their attentiveness by turning off the TV, radio, cell phone, and computer and really listening.
- Parents are encouraged to talk "with" and not "at" their child. They should welcome their child's questions. If they don't know the answer to a question, they can look it up together.



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**[www.ctclearinghouse.org](http://www.ctclearinghouse.org)**

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

## Teaching A Child The Facts

A child needs to know how substances can harm the brain, affect the body, and cause problems at home and in school. Kids who know the facts are more likely to make good choices.

- If a child likes sports, parents can focus on how smoking and vaping can affect athletic performance. Or they can say that tobacco causes bad breath and yellow teeth. Parents can get the facts on tobacco by visiting [www.cdc.gov/tobacco](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco).
- Parents can remind their child that alcohol is a powerful drug that slows down the body and brain. Parents can get the facts on alcohol by visiting [www.niaaa.nih.gov/underage-drinking-0](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/underage-drinking-0).
- Parents can tell their child how other drugs – like steroids, marijuana, and prescription medicines – affect the brain and body. Parents can get the facts on drugs by visiting [teens.drugabuse.gov/teens/drug-facts](http://teens.drugabuse.gov/teens/drug-facts).

## Setting Clear Rules For A Child

Not wanting to upset their parents is the number one reason kids give for not using drugs. A child will be less tempted to use tobacco, alcohol, and drugs if parents explain their rules clearly.

Here are some things that parents will want to keep in mind when they talk to their child:

- Explain that rules are set to keep the child safe
- Tell the child they expect her not to use tobacco, alcohol, or drugs
- Let the child know what will happen if he breaks the rules — and follow through if he does
- Praise the child for good behavior

## Helping A Child Learn How To Say “No.”

Kids say that they use alcohol and other drugs to “fit in and belong” with other kids. That’s why it’s important for parents to help children build the confidence to make a healthy choice when someone offers tobacco, drugs, or alcohol.

## Setting A Good Example

- If parents smoke or vape, they can make a plan to quit.
- If they drink alcohol, they should not drink too much or too often.
- If they have an alcohol or drug problem, they can find a treatment program near them.
- They can use prescription and over-the-counter medicines safely.
- They should never drink or use drugs and drive.

## What If Parents Have Used Drugs In The Past?

Parents are encouraged to be honest with their child, but not give a lot of details.

## Get Help If Needed

If parents think their child may have a drug or alcohol problem, they can get help. Getting treatment early can make a difference.

## Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental  
Health and Addiction Services  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DMHAS>

CT Department of Children and  
Families  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DCF>

United Way 2-1-1  
[www.211ct.org](http://www.211ct.org)  
2.1.1 or 1.800.203.1234

## National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental  
Health Services Administration  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

Centers for Disease Control  
and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

