

Talking To Your Kids

When talking to your kids about drugs and alcohol:

- Acknowledge that marijuana, alcohol and tobacco are harmful substances. Explain that nicotine and prescription drugs are also "abuse-able" and should be treated the same as alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Start talking with your kids at an early age, using friendly words and explanations. Help your child feel comfortable talking to you about "difficult" topics such as drugs, alcohol and smoking.
- Listen carefully to your child. Educate yourself so you can answer his or her questions. As children get older, their questions get more difficult, so you need to be prepared.
- Peer pressure may play a pivotal role in a child's decision to use drugs, drink or smoke. However, encourage your child to be their own person and make their own decisions.
- Try to impress on your child the long-term consequences drinking, smoking or using drugs may have on something they enjoy doing, such as sports, math or writing.
- Point out that adolescents are in a period of life during which they need their brains to operate at full efficiency. These substances can impair brain function.
- Explain that these substances may dull a painful part of their lives for a brief period, but it will never change or help the underlying situation.
- Write a family "contract" established to make your opinions on drug use, drinking and smoking clear. Be consistent with family rules.
- Be a model of healthy behavior for your child.

*Adapted from "Just Say Know: Talking With Your Kids About Drugs And Alcohol" -
Cynthia Kuhn*



When talking to your kids about drugs and alcohol:

- Acknowledge that marijuana, alcohol and tobacco are substances that are out there and that many people use them. Explain that nicotine and prescription drugs are also "abuse-able"
- Start talking with your kids at an early age and take time to explain things to your child in basic terms that are easily understandable. Make your child comfortable talking to you about "difficult" topics such as drugs, alcohol and smoking.
- Listen carefully to your child. Educate yourself so you can answer his or her questions. As children get older, their questions get more difficult, so you need to be prepared.
- Peer pressure may play a pivotal role in a child's decision to use drugs, drink or smoke. However, encourage your child to be their own person and make their own decisions.
- Tell your child the truth—that drugs, alcohol and tobacco may make them feel good for a while (by activating brain chemicals). Unfortunately, that feeling is brief and no one can know the true potency or lifetime effects of these substances.
- Try to impress on your child the long-term consequences drinking, smoking or using drugs may have on something they enjoy doing, such as sports, math or writing.
- Point out that adolescents are in a period of life during which they need their brains to operate at full efficiency. These substances can impair brain function.
- Make the point that repeated "chemical activation" will eventually cause people to crave that chemical and want to keep using it even if it hurts them.
- Explain that these substances may dull a painful part of their lives for a brief period, but it will never change or help the underlying situation.
- Write a family "contract" established to make your opinions on drug use, drinking and smoking clear. Be consistent with family rules.
- Be a model of healthy behavior for your child.

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More Tips for Parents...

Just as you inoculate your kids against illnesses like measles, you can help "immunize" them against drug use by giving them the facts now.

When kids don't feel comfortable talking to parents, they're likely to seek answers elsewhere, even if their sources are unreliable. Kids who aren't properly informed are at greater risk of engaging in unsafe behaviors and experimenting with drugs.

Preschool to Age 7

Before you get nervous about talking to young kids, take heart. You've probably already laid the groundwork for a discussion. For instance, whenever you give a fever medication or an antibiotic to your child, you have the opportunity to discuss the benefits and the appropriate and responsible use of those drugs. This is also a time when your child is likely to be very attentive to your behavior and guidance.

Start taking advantage of "teachable moments" now. If you see a character on a billboard or on TV with a cigarette, talk about smoking, nicotine addiction, and what smoking does to a person's body. This can lead into a discussion about other drugs and how they can potentially cause harm.

Ages 8 to 12

As your kids grow older, you can begin conversations with them by asking them what they think about drugs. By asking the questions in a nonjudgmental, open-ended way, you're more likely to get an honest response.

Kids this age usually are still willing to talk openly to their parents about touchy subjects. Establishing a dialogue now helps keep the door open as kids get older and are less inclined to share their thoughts and feelings.

Even if your question doesn't immediately result in a discussion, you'll get your kids thinking about the issue. If you show your kids that you're willing to discuss the topic and hear what they have to say, they might be more willing to come to you for help in the future.

Ages 13 to 17

Kids this age are likely to know other kids who use alcohol or drugs, and to have friends who drive. Many are still willing to express their thoughts or concerns with parents about it. Use these conversations not only to understand your child's thoughts and feelings, but also to talk about the dangers of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Talk about the legal issues — jail time and fines — and the possibility that they or someone else might be killed or seriously injured.

Adapted from KidsHealth