

Conversation Starters

Get the Conversation Going

Starting a conversation about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs with your kids is never easy -- but it's also not as difficult as you may think.

Your teens may be pressing for independence but the truth is they need to hear from you. Use blocks of time such as after dinner, before bedtime, before school or on the drive to or from school and extracurricular activities to talk about drugs and why they're harmful. Take advantage of everyday "teachable moments" and, in no time at all, you'll have developed an ongoing dialogue with your child. Teachable moments refer to using every day events in your life to point out things you'd like your child to know about.

Use the following "teachable moments" as a starting point, but develop others based on your own life:

- Point out alcohol, tobacco, and drug-related situations going on in your own neighborhood. If you and your child are at the park and see a group of kids drinking or smoking, use the moment to talk about the negative effects of alcohol and tobacco.
- Use newspaper headlines or TV news stories as a conversation starter. The daily news is filled with stories that detail the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse. Talk to your child about the mother who used drugs and was arrested. Who will take care of her baby now? Did she make a good decision when she used drugs?

Watch TV with your kids, and ask them what they think. Do the shows and advertising make drug use look acceptable and routine? Or do they show its downside? How did that program make your child feel about drugs? Write a letter with your child to companies or TV networks about the messages they put out about drugs. Also remember that anti-drug advertising — such as that from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America — is a great kickoff to discussion.

Age Appropriate Advice: Grades 9-12

Talking and making choices about Alcohol , Tobacco , and other drug use are nothing new to teens. Today's teens are savvy about drug use, making distinctions not only among different drugs and their effects, but also among trial, occasional use, and addiction. They witness many of their peers using drugs — some without obvious or immediate consequences, others whose drug use gets out of control. By now, your teen has had to make tough decisions about whether he would give in to peer pressure and experiment with drugs or go against some peers and stay clean.

All of these experiences — along with messages from you, teachers, friends, the media, and entertainment sources — have guided your teen toward his or her current attitude about drugs. By age 16, kids' exposure to drugs and their attitudes toward the messages they receive from their parents are fairly firm — but this doesn't mean you should stop talking to your teen about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. By keeping the conversation going, you'll help your teen enter his adult years healthy and ready to raise the next generation of drug-free kids.

A few tips for you and your teen:

- **Give general messages about drug use the heave-ho — your older teen needs to hear detailed and reality-driven messages.** Topics you might want to talk about with your teen include: that even trying a drug or using it occasionally can have serious permanent consequences, that anyone can become a chronic user or an addict, and the potentially deadly effects of combining drugs.
- **Emphasize what drug use can do to your teen's future.** Teens look ahead and think about their future. Discuss how drug use can ruin your teen's chance of getting into the college she's been dreaming about, landing the job she's perfect for, or joining the military and following in her father's footsteps.
- **Encourage your teen to volunteer somewhere they can see the impact drug use has on your community.** Teenagers tend to be idealistic and enjoy hearing about ways they can help make the world a better place. Help your teen research volunteer opportunities at local homeless shelters, hospitals, or victim services centers.
- **Use news reports as discussion openers.** If you see a news story about an alcohol-related car accident, talk to your teen about all the victims that an accident leaves in its wake. If the story is about drugs in your community, talk about the ways your community has changed as drug use has grown.
- **Compliment and encourage your teen for the all the things he does well and for the positive choices he makes.** Let him know that he is seen and appreciated. And let him know how you appreciate what a good role model he is for his younger brother or sister, or for other kids in the community. Teens still care what their parents think. Let him know how deeply disappointed you would be if he started using drugs.

What drugs are in the teen's world.

Tobacco, Alcohol, Marijuana, Ritalin & other prescription drugs, Inhalants, Ecstasy, Cocaine/Crack, Meth, LSD, Mushrooms, GHB, Heroin, Rohypnol, Ketamine .