

Talking To Your Kids About Drugs

Research shows that parents are the #1 influence on their child's decision regarding substance use. Here are some tips you can use to prevent your kids from using alcohol and other drugs.

Be clear with your kids that you don't want them using drugs. Parents are role models for their children, so your views on alcohol, tobacco, and drugs can strongly influence the views of your child. Be very clear that ALL drug use is unacceptable.

Begin these discussions early in a child's life. This "normalizes" the conversation. When kids do not feel comfortable talking to parents, they likely seek answers elsewhere, even if the source is unreliable. Kids who aren't properly informed are at greater risk of experimenting with drugs.

Talk often about the dangers and results of drug use. Talk about the health risks of drug use, talk about the dangers of driving under the influence, talk about legal issues – such as jail time and fines – and what all of this might mean for their future.

Be a better listener, ask questions, and encourage them. Your child's first reaction when you raise the subject of drugs is to be quiet. Try to make it a two-way conversation. Ask questions. Do they know of anyone who uses drugs? Do any of their friends use drugs? Do any of their friends drive while they are under the influence? Keep asking questions and listen to the answers.

Don't lie if you used drugs in the past. You risk credibility if your kids discover the real truth. Admit that you've made mistakes in your past, but don't go into detail about your personal experiences. Let them know that you don't want them making the same mistakes you made. Remember, this isn't about your past – it's about your child's future.

Ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand. It's easy as parents to assume we know what our kids are going through. Asking them clarifying questions shows that you really care about what they are saying. It will also help them from feeling like you are out of touch with their reality.

Use entertainment news to introduce the subject. We call these "teachable moments." You can talk about celebrities who are in and out of rehab, who have committed crimes while under the influence, who have overdosed, or about the use of steroids in professional sports.

Don't react in a way that will cut off discussion. Stay calm and non-judgmental. If you react harshly, show anger or anxiety, your kids may shut down.

Role play ways to refuse drugs and alcohol. It may be inevitable that your child is confronted with a situation where they are offered drugs, so they need to be prepared when it happens. Help them construct phrases and responses to say no when they are in that situation. Act out possible scenarios. For example:

- (For young athletes) "I can't. The coach will find out and put me on the bench."
- (At a party) "I need to get home. If I'm late with the car, my parents will kill me."
- (Any time) "I am not feeling well."

Establish a written or verbal contract. Use a contract as a way of letting your child know that you're there to help them if they make a mistake and get involved with drugs. Let them know that they can call you for help if they are in a compromising situation. By discussing all of this with your kids from the start, you eliminate surprises and make your expectations clear.

If you suspect your child is using drugs or alcohol, get help. By intervening early, you can save them from the health and impairment consequences of substance use and potential addiction. Contact Samaritan CrisisCare at 97-224-4646 for help.



Community Overdose Action Team

Working Together To Combat Opioid Overdoses

www.phdmc.org/coat

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