

Talking to Your Child About Drugs

Parents can help protect kids against drug use by giving them the facts before they're in a risky situation. This can make them less likely to experiment with drugs or to rely on friends for answers.

You're a role model for your kids, and your views on alcohol, tobacco, and drugs can strongly affect how they think about them. So make talking about drugs a part of your general health and safety conversations.

How Should I Talk to My Young Child About Drugs?

Take advantage of "teachable moments" now. If you see a character in a movie or on TV with a cigarette, talk about smoking and what it does to a person's body. This can lead to a talk about other drugs and how they can harm.

Keep your tone calm and use terms that your child can understand. Explain that drugs are dangerous and can cause lots of problems in the body. Teach kids early on how to say no if someone offers them something they know is dangerous.

How Should I Talk to My 8- to 12-Year-Old About Drugs?

As kids grow older, start talks with them by asking them what they've heard about drugs. Ask in a nonjudgmental, open-ended way, so you're more likely to get an honest response.

Remember to show your kids that you're listening and really paying attention to their concerns and questions. To give your kids the facts, you might have to do a little research.

Kids this age usually are still willing to talk openly to their parents about touchy subjects. Talking now helps keep the door open as kids get older so they continue to share their thoughts and feelings.

News about things like steroid use in professional sports can be a way to start a talk and to give your kids information about the risks of drugs.

How Should I Talk to My Teen About Drugs?

Teens are likely to have peers who use alcohol or drugs, and to have friends who drive. Have conversations not only to understand your teen'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.

Consider making a written or verbal contract on the rules about going out or using the car. You can promise to pick your kids up at any time (even 2 a.m.!), no questions asked, if they call you when the person responsible for driving has been drinking or using drugs.

They may ask you more specific questions about drugs. By discussing this with your teen from the start, you can make your expectations clear and help them feel safe coming to you.

How Can I Help Keep My Kids Safe From Drugs?

Drugs can affect any family. But by talking with your kids and staying involved in their lives, you can help keep them safe.

Encourage your kids to take part in hobbies, sports, and clubs that interest them. This can help with positive interactions and self-esteem. Know who their friends are and where they spend their time. Kids who have friends who use drugs are more likely to try drugs themselves.

Help kids know how to turn down drugs if they are offered. Let them know they can always text or call if they want to leave a situation and you will come get them.

A warm, open family environment — where kids can talk about their feelings, where their achievements are praised, and where their self-esteem is boosted — encourages kids to come forward with their questions and concerns.

Make talking with your kids a regular part of your day. Find time to do things you enjoy together as a family, which helps everyone stay connected and maintain open communication. Sometimes kids are more likely to talk when they don't have to make eye contact — like when you are in the car or walking together.

Pay attention so you know when your kids are going through tough times. Offer the support they need or get extra help, if it's needed.

Reviewed by: Larissa Hirsch, MD

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If you need more resources for yourself or for your child, talk to the Social Worker available to you at your local Boys & Girls Club at 302-430-2127 or go to www.lewescounseling.com

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