

Talking to Kids About Smoking: The Do's and Don't's

DO:

- Try to make your home a tobacco-free environment.
- Explain how the tobacco industry targets teens and kids to try to get them hooked. Nobody likes to be manipulated. Show them a few examples of marketing aimed at their age group. Discuss how cigarettes are portrayed as “cool” – and compare those portrayals with the reality of smoking.
- Know who they are hanging out with. Young people are more likely to start smoking if they have friends who smoke.
- Help them build up their self-confidence. Most kids who smoke are struggling with issues like low self-esteem or body image issues.
- Help them develop healthy ways of coping and dealing with stress.
- Encourage them to get involved in extracurricular activities – they'll be too busy to smoke.

DON'T:

- Don't leave cigarettes where kids can find them.
- Don't treat smoking as an “adult” choice – this can have the unintended effect of making cigarettes seem sophisticated and grown-up.
- Don't forget about smokeless tobacco, cigars, or hookah pipes – there is no “safe” way to use tobacco.
- Don't lecture. Ask questions and listen to what they have to say.
- Don't stop talking about smoking – discuss smoking often, and be very clear about your expectations.

Need More Information? / Web Resources / For More Information / To Learn More

Here are a few websites you can visit to find more information about keeping kids smoke-free:

- The Truth: www.thetruth.com
- Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids:
www.tobaccofreekids.org
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
www.cdc.gov
- American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org

Refusal Skills: Saying “No ”

Most young people start smoking because they feel like they need to fit in. Discuss situations where they might feel extra pressured to light up – and then help them come up with a few good ways to say “no” like:

- “No thanks, cigarette smoke makes me feel sick.”
- “You know those cause cancer, right?”
- “I've got a date tonight – I don't want to smell like an ashtray.”
- “My coach will cut me from the team if I get caught smoking.”

Remind them that a simple “no” works fine, too – they don't owe anybody an explanation.

KIDS & SMOKING PREVENTION



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*Starting a
Conversation*

Get Them Talking / Conversation Starters

What can you do to help kids stay smoke-free and stay cool under pressure from friends? Start a two-way conversation. Not sure where to start? Why not start here:

Start A Conversation With Questions

Kids and teens are more likely to listen if they feel like they're part of a two-way conversation. If you want to talk about smoking, avoid lecturing. Instead, start the conversation by asking open-ended questions, such as:

- Has anyone ever offered you a cigarette? How did you respond?
- Do any of your friends smoke? Why do they smoke? Where do they get their cigarettes?
- Do any of your friends' parents smoke?
- Have you ever tried smoking? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about smoking?
- Why do you think kids and teens start smoking?
- Have you ever felt pressured to smoke?
- What would you do if someone offered you a cigarette?
- Have you ever been at a party/social event where people were smoking?

Use the Media to Your Advantage

You can't prevent kids from seeing smoking on TV, in movies, or in video games – but you can turn media portrayals of smoking into teachable moments. Ask them:

- Why do you think that person is smoking?
- What do you think about that character?
- Do you think this person/character is a good role model? Why or why not?
- Do you think this makes smoking look "cool"?



Unhealthy and Unattractive

Teens know that cigarettes can lead to health problems such as cancer, heart disease and emphysema – but they have a hard time imagining those things ever happening to them. Instead of focusing on the distant future, focus on the more immediate – and unattractive – effects of smoking, such as:

- Smelly hair and clothing
- Wrinkly skin
- Yellow teeth
- Bad breath
- Stained fingers
- Shortness of breath



Honesty is the Best Policy

If you're a current or former smoker:

- Explain why you started.
- Talk about why you quit (or why you want to quit).
- Describe what it feels like to be addicted to nicotine.
- Express how hard it is to quit.
- Mention any smoking-related health problems you've had.

If you've never smoked:

- Explain why you never wanted to start.
- Mention friends or relatives who have had smoking-related health problems.
- Discuss how you handled peer pressure.

Never Too Late: Talking to Kids That Smoke

What about kids who have already tried smoking? What should you say?

How do you help them quit – and stay away from tobacco for good?

First, find out why they started. Kids and teens that smoke are often dealing with other, more serious problems:

- Stress
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Trouble in school
- Peer pressure issues
- Weight or body image issues

Once you understand why they started smoking, work with them to help them stop – and to help them deal with the issues that led to smoking in the first place.

