

## Talking to Kids About Drugs:

### The Do's and Don'ts

#### DO:

- Set clear rules about drug use – and make sure they understand what will happen to them if they break those rules.
- Work on confidence. Most young people start using drugs because they are struggling with low self-esteem. Many have trouble fitting in with their peers. Help them build their confidence and develop healthy ways of coping and dealing with stress.
- Choose a good time to talk. Avoid times when they are distracted with schoolwork, video games or other activities. Wait until you can get – and keep – their full attention.
- Encourage them to get involved with extracurricular activities, such as sports, music, art or clubs.

#### DON'T:

- Don't lecture. Give kids lots of opportunities to talk and express their opinions.
- Don't assume that one talk is enough. Talk to kids frequently about the risks associated with alcohol abuse and underage drinking.
- Don't wait until you catch kids drinking to think of a punishment. Set clear rules and expectations early on, and make sure kids know exactly what will happen if they break your rules about drinking.
- Don't ignore your instincts. If you suspect that a kid is drinking, talk to them. Ask questions. Let them know you're paying attention.

### Under Pressure

Many young people start using drugs because they feel pressured. They feel like they have to smoke a joint or pop a pill just to fit in. Discuss situations, such as parties or other social events, where they might feel extra pressure to use drugs and then help them come up with a few good ways to say "no."

- "My parents will ground me for life if they find out."
- "Sorry. I'm driving tonight."
- "That stuff makes you stupid. I need all my brain cells for the chem test next week."

## Learn More : Additional Resources

Here are a few websites you can visit to learn more about how to keep kids and teens drug-free:

- Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD): [www.sadd.org](http://www.sadd.org)
- Parents. The Anti-Drug: [www.theantidrug.org](http://www.theantidrug.org)
- National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)
- NIDA for Teens: [www.teens.drugabuse.gov](http://www.teens.drugabuse.gov)

# KIDS & DRUG PREVENTION



*Starting a  
Conversation*



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## Talking Matters

*"My teen is way too smart to try drugs."*

*"If my teen were on drugs, I'd know."*

*"I've already had the 'drug talk' with my teen."*

*"I smoked pot when I was younger – giving my kid an anti-drug speech would be hypocritical."*

Any of these sound familiar?

Parents sometimes feel that their kids already know all there is about drug abuse. Some have already had the "drug talk" and don't feel like they need to do it again. Others feel uncomfortable talking about such adult subject matters with their children.

While there are certain factors that put some teens at an especially high risk – such as a family history of drug abuse, lack of supervision, depression and low self-esteem – the truth is that no teen is completely immune to curiosity, peer pressure or the occasional bad decision. Studies suggest that kids and teens are less likely to use drugs if they have positive and close relationships with their parents or other trusted adults.

## Discuss – Don't Lecture

Kids and teens are much less likely to tune you out if they feel like they're part of a discussion.

Ask open-ended questions, or use follow-up questions to keep them talking:

- Has anyone ever offered you drugs? How did you respond?
- Do any kids at school use drugs? Why? Where do they get their drugs?
- Have you ever tried drugs? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about drugs?
- Why do you think kids and teens experiment with drugs?
- What would you do if someone offered you drugs?



## Avoid Scare Tactics

While it's true that drugs can kill people, teens and kids aren't likely to respond well to scare tactics or over-the-top stories. There's a good chance that your kid knows people who have gotten high without dying. Focus on the more realistic – and immediate – consequences of drug use:

- **Impaired decision-making skills.** Drugs interfere with your ability to make good decisions. That's why people on drugs are more likely to do dumb stunts, get in fights, or have unprotected sex.
- **Increased risk of drugged driving.** Most teens know that drinking and driving is dangerous – but drugged driving is just as risky as driving drunk.
- **Legal problems.** Getting caught with drugs can lead to serious long-term consequences, including jail time, probation, and heavy fines. Plus, a drug arrest can make it hard to get into college or find a job.
- **Addiction.** Drug addicts don't intend to get hooked – but it doesn't take long for your brain to become dependent on the "high" feeling that comes with drug abuse. All too often, young people who just get high occasionally at parties wind up with a lifelong drug habit.

## Use TV Shows, News Articles and Movies

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

- Why do you think that person is using drugs?
- Do you think this person is a good role model? Why or why not?
- What would you do if you were in that situation?
- Do you think shows/movies like this make kids and teens want to use drugs?

## Honesty is the Best Policy

If you have used drugs in the past:

- Explain why you tried drugs.
- Talk about the negative side effects you experienced.
- Mention any drug related health problem you may have had.

If you never used drugs when you were young, explain how you handled peer pressure. Talk about the things in your life that helped you stay drug-free.

## Know the Signs

How do you know if a kid is using drugs? Here are a few signs to look for:

- Mood swings and withdrawn behavior
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Drastic weight loss
- Drop in grades and school performance
- Sudden change in friends and activities
- Extreme need for privacy

Of course, not all of these signs mean that a kid is on drugs. Young people – especially teenagers – often seem moody and withdrawn, and it's normal for them to experiment with different interests and friends as they try to figure out who they are. However, a drop in grades paired with sudden weight loss might be a sign of a serious problem. Trust your instincts.

If you do find out that a kid is using drugs, stay calm and try to focus on the reasons that they started experimenting with drugs in the first place. Revisit your rules about drugs, and encourage them to come to you if they have questions or problems. Most importantly, keep talking: Kids and teens who feel that they can talk to a trusted adult are less likely to use drugs.

