

Who is going to keep my kids from using Alcohol & Drugs?

Why should I talk to my kids about alcohol and drug use?

Parents often struggle with determining the appropriate age to discuss alcohol and drugs with their children. Parents may believe the misconception that if they talk with their child about alcohol and drugs, their child will become more interested in experimenting with them. Since it is common for school-aged children to discuss alcohol and drugs with their peers, parents have to be ahead of the game by having these discussions and providing their child with accurate information. Children today can be exposed to illegal drugs as early as elementary school, so it's never too early to talk with them about drug abuse. It may feel uncomfortable to talk with your child about alcohol and other drugs, however, studies have shown that parents who speak with their children about living a healthy lifestyle results in children who develop to their greatest potential.

Still Uncomfortable?

Here are some facts to consider on adolescents and drugs use:

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) states that adolescents ages 12-17 named drugs as the most important problem they face - more than social pressure, violence, crime, or any other issue(s). Drugs are everywhere and their influences are unbiased to geographic, economic, and ethnic factors. The most commonly used drugs by ages 12-17 are alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and nonmedical use of prescription medications.



Kids who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are significantly less likely to use drugs, yet 20 percent report not getting that benefit.



Alcohol affects youths differently than adults. When alcohol is used prior to the brain fully developing, it may lead to long-lasting intellectual effects.



Using marijuana at an early age is independently associated with poorer school performance.

Prescription medications are now the most commonly used drugs among 12-13 year olds.



Most children obtain the medication from their parents' medicine cabinet.

BE EQUIPPED WITH THE FACTS

Alcohol

If your child is not yet drinking alcohol, he or she may be receiving pressure to drink from peers. Keeping quiet with your concerns of child's potential alcohol use may give the impression that it's okay for children to drink alcohol. While parents who drink alcohol may feel hypocritical talking to their child about drinking alcohol, it's important to remember that alcohol affects young people differently than adults. The human brain reaches complete maturation between ages 18-25. When alcohol is used prior to the brain fully developing, it may lead to long-lasting intellectual effects. The younger a person is when they first begin to drink increases their likelihood of developing alcohol dependence later in life.

Marijuana

Rising marijuana use reflects changing perceptions and attitudes. The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA 2104) reports that marijuana use in American high schools are now at a higher rate than tobacco use. This reversal in trend may be attributed to recent public discussions over "medical marijuana." Movements to legalize the drug for adult recreational use in some states may be giving children the impression that marijuana is safe. Since the hippocampus is the part of the brain most affected by marijuana use, a teenager using marijuana may experience problems in decision-making, concentration, coordination, learning, memory and proper brain development.

Tobacco

Tobacco may be easily accessible to children and adolescents, especially when it's in the home. It's important for children to know the negative consequences of tobacco use. In addition to all the commonly known affects of tobacco such as various forms of cancer, it's important to convey the highly addictive aspect of tobacco. This means, it becomes difficult to discontinue use of tobacco, even after becoming aware of its negative effects on one's health. After only a few weeks of using spit tobacco, users may experience white spots, sores and bleeding in the mouth. These symptoms and health changes are important to recognize as it may assist you with being diligent in awareness of drug use.

Are you now convinced “the talk” needs to happen?

Here are some guidelines to help you get through it:

1. Ask yourself what you’re trying to accomplish and focus on that goal. **Establish and maintain good communication with your child.** If your child can communicate their everyday issues with you, it may help them resist peer pressure to use alcohol and/or drugs to solve problems.
2. **Control your emotions.** You may feel shocked by some of the things your child informs you of. It is important to exercise active listening and non-judgmental response. If your child feels emotionally safe to tell you anything, it is likely they will confide in you during tough decision-making.
3. **Ask open ended questions.** Children are more prone to share their feelings and opinions if they feel it matters. Avoiding “yes” or “no” answered questions, helps create a non-judgmental conversation.
4. **Become educated on the effects of alcohol and drugs.** The more you are educated on the facts and issues surrounding alcohol and drug use, the more you can help your child become aware of its dangers.



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For additional information on this topic feel free to call your Employee Assistance Program Coordinator:

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