

Talking to Your Child About Drugs

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Have an open dialogue about drugs with your kids

Talking with your child about drugs is an important and vital conversation. Too many parents these days avoid talking with their children because they feel uncomfortable, don't want to seem lame or even think that schools provide them with enough information to do the job. Sadly, all of these reasons are exactly why you need to talk with your children at a young age about the dangers of experimenting with drugs. It's important to provide them with the necessary information so that if they are ever offered drugs, they have the confidence to say no.

Creating an atmosphere of open dialogue fosters a healthy environment in which to talk to your children about drugs. When children don't feel comfortable talking with their parents or asking them questions they will often search for information elsewhere. This information may not be credible and can put them in risky and unsafe situations. Parents themselves need education to talk to their children about this extremely important topic. Learning about the effects of drug abuse and other facts will help to clear up misconceptions that your child might have.

Don't think that the conversation has to wait until your child has been exposed to drugs. The fact is, the sooner the talk with them happens and is made a part of your regular health discussions, the more likely they are to have the desire and be prepared to say no to drugs. Remember that parents are role models for their child, so a parent's view on drugs, alcohol, and tobacco will affect their child's decisions.

Preschool to Age 7

Take advantage of the time and attention that your children want to give you when they are young. This is the age where your children will be most attentive to your behavior and guidance, so don't pass up on teaching opportunities. There are many opportunities available for you to talk with your kids about properly using medication. Think about it: When you give your child some medicine you can share how you should only take the recommend amount and follow the directions.

Investigate the TV shows and the commercials that your children are exposed to. This can seem overwhelming at first, but preparing yourself by researching is your best defense.

Remember that you need to keep the tone of this conversation calm and collected. Use words that your child will be familiar with or easy to explain. Don't think this conversation should happen only once when your children are little. Keeping your conversation length to an appropriate amount of time will also help your child remember what you taught. Have conversations regularly and encourage your child to ask questions.

Ages 8 to 12

When your child gets older, start the conversation by asking what they think about drugs. They will really appreciate this because it will let them express themselves and know that their thoughts matter. Let them express their feelings and ask any questions that they might have.

Reinforcing good dialogue when they are still young enough to want to listen to you is an important lesson to learn. Don't worry if your questions don't prompt an in-depth discussion at first because simply asking them what they think will get them thinking about the effects of drugs. Letting your kids know that you are willing and open to talk about drugs is one of the most important things a parent can do.

The use of drugs is so evident in our mainstream entertainment like acting, sports and music. Take advantage of your child's interest in sports and explain to them that the best athletes are those who keep their bodies free from harmful toxins. Explain the dangers of drugs such as steroids and how they can lead people to even worse drugs.

Ages 13 to 17

You can't shield your kids; most children know people who have access to drugs and alcohol. You need to reinforce what you have taught your child over the years about the harmful effects of drugs and how they can say no to them and even avoid them altogether. Don't rule out that your kids aren't willing to talk with you about drugs just because they are teenagers. Many are open to having a discussion about things in their life.

Having conversations regularly with your kids about the effects of drugs and alcohol will help to encourage them to avoid substance abuse all together. Use these conversations to express the consequences of participating in these activities such as jail time and fines. Even explain that their actions affect others and if they engage in drug-related activities it could cost somebody their life.

Discuss with your family the idea of drawing up a written contract about drugs, alcohol and other harmful substances. Explain to them that if they are in a sticky situation or something is making them feel uncomfortable that they can call you any time to pick them up. Be sure to share with them the consequences of breaking this contract such as loss of privileges, like driving.

Laying Good Groundwork

No one is immune to the effects of drugs. Children everywhere will at one point in time come in contact with some drug. Preparing them to know what to do in these difficult circumstances is the best defense.

Get your whole family involved with the fight against drugs and be mindful of the friends they keep. Studies have shown that kids with friends who use drugs are most likely to experiment with drugs themselves. Children who also are experiencing family conflict, depression or loneliness are more likely to turn to drugs as a coping mechanism. Get to know their friends and their families, understand what they are going through at school and encourage them to get involved in extracurricular activities.

A great activity to try with your kids is role playing what to do when they are put in difficult situations. Play out scenarios about different environments they might be in where they could come in contact with drugs. Discuss with each other the best ways to avoid them and even come up with phrases that they are comfortable with saying if they are ever offered drugs.

Make your home a safe environment where your kids can talk with you about their concerns and you can share your thoughts. Be sure to listen and give them a chance to express themselves. Some of the best ways to teach is simply to listen. Finding fun activities to do together will help create open communication among all family members.

Don't hesitate to ask your doctor for any advice about what you can do to help you child avoid drugs. For more information, visit these resources below.

- [Time to Talk Kit](#) (PDF)
- [How to Talk to Your Kids About Drugs](#)
- [Drug Guide](#)
- [Talking With Kids About Tough Issues](#)
- [Talking With Kids About Alcohol & Drugs](#)
- [Signs & Symptoms of Drug Use](#)
- [Preventing Drug Abuse Among Children & Adolescents](#) (PDF)
- [Alcohol & Drug Addiction Happens in the Best of Families](#) (PDF)

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