



Research shows that kids who learn a lot about the risks of drugs from their parents are up to 50% less likely to use. By talking to your kids about drugs and alcohol, you can help them make better choices and live safer, healthier lives. The enclosed booklet will give you the tools you need to start that conversation, no matter what their age. There are age-appropriate examples for each stage of development from preschool through college. It's never too late to start that conversation. If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction or have questions, give us call for information or resources. 877-366-7593.

## Talking with Kids™ about Drugs and Alcohol

The issue of drugs can be very confusing to young children. If drugs are so dangerous, then why is the family medicine cabinet full of them? And why do TV, movies, music and advertising often make drug and alcohol use look so cool?

We need to help our kids to distinguish fact from fiction. And it's not too soon to begin. National studies show that the average age when a child first tries alcohol is 11; for marijuana, it's 12. And many kids start becoming curious about these substances even sooner. So let's get started!

**Listen carefully** - Student surveys reveal that when parents listen to their children's feelings and concerns, their kids feel comfortable speaking with them and are more likely to stay drug-free.

**Role play how to say "no"** - Role play ways in which your child can refuse to go along with his friends without becoming a social outcast. Try something like this, "Let's play a game. Suppose you and your friends are at Andy's house after school and they find some beer in the refrigerator and ask you to join them in drinking it. The rule in our family is that children are not allowed to drink alcohol. So what could you say?" If your child comes up with a good response, praise him. If he doesn't, offer a few suggestions like, "No, thanks. Let's play with Sony PlayStation instead," or "No thanks. I don't drink beer. I need to keep in shape for basketball."

**Encourage choice**- Allow your child plenty of opportunity to become a confident decision-maker. An 8-year-old is capable of deciding if she wants to invite lots of friends to her birthday party or just a close pal or two. A 12-year-old can choose whether she wants to go out for chorus or join the school band. As your child becomes more skilled at making all kinds of good choices, both you and she will feel more secure in her ability to make the right decision concerning alcohol and drugs if and when the time arrives.

**Provide age-appropriate information** - Make sure the information that you offer fits the child's age and stage. When your 6 or 7-year-old is brushing his teeth, you can say, "There are lots of things we do to keep our bodies healthy, like brushing our teeth. But there are also things we shouldn't do because they hurt our bodies, like smoking or taking medicines when we are not sick."

If you are watching TV with your 8 year-old and marijuana is mentioned on a program, you can say, "Do you know what marijuana is? It's a bad drug that can hurt your body." If your child has more questions, answer them. If not, let it go. Short, simple comments said and repeated often enough will get the message across.

You can offer your older child the same message, but add more drug-specific information. For example, you might explain to your 12-year-old what marijuana and crack look like, their street names and how they can affect his body.

**Establish a clear family position on drugs** - It's okay to say, "We don't allow any drug use and children in this family are not allowed to drink alcohol. The only time that you can take any drugs is when the doctor or Mom or Dad gives you medicine when you're sick. We made this rule because we love you very much and we know that drugs can hurt your body and make you very sick; some may even kill you. Do you have any questions?"

**Be a good example** - Children will do what you do much more readily than what you say. So try not to reach for a beer the minute you come home after a tough day; it sends the message that drinking is the best way to unwind. Offer dinner guests non-alcoholic drinks in addition to wine and spirits. And take care not to pop pills, even over-the-counter remedies, indiscriminately. Your behavior needs to reflect your beliefs.

**Discuss what makes a good friend** -Since peer pressure is so important when it comes to kids' involvement with drugs and alcohol, it makes good sense to talk with your children about what makes a good friend. To an 8-year-old you might say, "A good friend is someone who enjoys the same games and activities that you do and who is fun to be around." 11 to 12-year-olds can understand that a friend is someone who shares their values and experiences, respects their decisions and listens to their feelings. Once you've gotten these concepts across, your children will understand that "friends" who pressure them to drink or smoke pot aren't friends at all. Additionally, encouraging skills like sharing and cooperation—and strong involvement in fun, healthful activities (such as team sports or scouting)—will help your children make and maintain good friendships as they mature and increase the chance that they'll remain drug-free.

**Build self-esteem** – Kids who feel good about themselves are much less likely than other kids to turn to illegal substances to get high. As parents, we can do many things to enhance our children's self-image. Here are some pointers:

**Offer lots of praise for any job well done.** - If you need to criticize your child, talk about the action, not the person. If your son gets a math problem wrong, it's better to say, "I think you added wrong. Let's try again."

Assign do-able chores. A 6-year-old can bring her plate over to the sink after dinner; a 12-year-old can feed and walk the dog after school. Performing such duties and being praised for them helps your child feel good about himself.

Spend one-on-one time with your youngster. Setting aside at least 15 uninterrupted minutes per child per day to talk, play a game, or take a walk together, lets her know you care.

Say, "I love you." Nothing will make your child feel better.

**Repeat the message** - Information and lessons about drugs are important enough to repeat frequently. So be sure to answer your children's questions as often as they ask them to initiate conversation whenever the opportunity arises.

**If you suspect a problem, seek help** - While kids under age 12 rarely develop a substance problem, it can—and does—happen. If your child becomes withdrawn, loses weight, starts doing poorly in school, turns extremely moody, has glassy eyes—or if the drugs in your medicine cabinet seem to be disappearing too quickly—talk with your child and reach out to any one of the organizations listed here. You'll be helping your youngster to a healthier, happier future.

## **Questions & Answers**

### **Why do people take bad or illegal drugs?**

There are lots of reasons. Maybe they don't know how dangerous they are. Or maybe they feel bad about themselves or don't know how to handle their problems. Or maybe they don't have parents they can talk to. Why do you think they do it?

### **Why are some drugs good and some drugs bad for you?**

When you get sick, the drugs the doctor gives you will help you get better. But if you take these drugs when you're healthy, they can make you sick. Also, there are some drugs, like marijuana or crack that are never good for you. To be safe, never ever take any drugs unless Mom, Dad or the doctor says it's okay.

# Preschool

Tips for guiding your child through the preschool years.

Since the foundation for all healthy habits — from nutrition to toothbrushing— is laid down during the preschool years, this is a great time to set the stage for a drug-free life. The following 7 tips will help you work with your preschooler so that he or she will grow up happy, healthy and drug-free.

- **Talk to your child about the joys of healthy living.** Explain the importance of taking good care of our bodies – eating right, exercising and getting a good night’s sleep. Discuss how good you feel when you take care of yourself — how you can run, jump, play and work for many hours. A great conversation starter: “I’m glad I’m healthy because I can...”
- **Celebrate your child’s decision-making skills.** Whenever possible, let your child choose what to wear. Even if the clothes don’t quite match, you are reinforcing your child’s ability to make decisions.
- **Stress the need for your child to take personal responsibility for his own health, well-being and personal environment.** Your instructions should be concrete, related to your child’s experiences, and stated positively. Turn chores like brushing teeth, putting away toys, wiping up spills, and caring for pets into fun experiences that your child will enjoy. Break the activities down into manageable steps so that your child learns to develop plans.
- **Help your child steer clear of dangerous substances that exist in her immediate world.** Point out poisonous and harmful chemicals commonly found in homes, such as bleach, kitchen cleansers and furniture polish. Read the products’ warning labels out loud to your child. Explain that she should only eat or smell food or a prescribed medicine that you, a relative or other known caregivers give to her. Also, explain that drugs from the doctor help the person the doctor gives them to but that they can harm someone else.
- **Help your child understand the difference between make-believe and real life.** Preschoolers give meaning to things they don’t understand in order to make sense of their world — but their meaning doesn’t necessarily reflect the real world. Ask your child what he thinks about a TV program or story. Let your child know about your likes and dislikes. Discuss how violence or bad decisions can hurt people.
- **Turn frustration into a learning opportunity.** If a tower of blocks keeps collapsing during a play session, work with your child to find possible solutions to the problem.
- **Tell your child how proud you are of her when she helps you with things.** There’s never a bad time to give your child a boost of self-esteem.

**Substances in your preschooler’s world can include:**

Tobacco, Alcohol, cleaning supplies.

**WHAT TO SAY ? OVER--**

**Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids.** But, when tackling some of life's tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your child at different ages. (Source: drugfree.org)

## **WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR 2 – 4 year OLD**

### **Scenario**

Giving your child a daily vitamin.

### **What to Say**

Vitamins help your body grow. You need to take them every day so that you'll grow up big and strong like Mommy and Daddy—but you should only take what I give you. Too many vitamins can hurt you and make you sick.

### **Scenario**

Your kids are curious about medicine bottles around the house.

### **What to Say**

You should only take medicines that have your name on them or that your doctor has chosen just for you. If you take medicine that belongs to somebody else, it could be dangerous and make you sick.

### **Scenario**

Your child sees an adult smoking and, since you've talked about the dangers of smoking, is confused. (Parenting expert Jen Singer says the same script applies to grade-schoolers.)

### **What to Say**

Grownups can make their own decisions and sometimes those decisions aren't the best for their bodies. Sometimes, when someone starts smoking, his or her body feels like it has to have cigarettes—even though it's not healthy. And that makes it harder for him or her to quit.

# Kindergarten to 3rd Grade

Tips for guiding your child through kindergarten to 3rd grade.

5-to-8-year olds are still tied to family and eager to please but they're also beginning to explore their individuality. In addition, your grade-schooler begins to spend more time at school and with peers and to collect information (including messages about drugs and alcohol) from lots of new places like the media and popular culture. It's very important that you continue talking to your child about a healthy drug-free lifestyle and stress that of all the voices your child hears, yours should be the guiding force.

Here are 9 tips to help you guide your child toward a healthy, drug-free life:

1. **Keep your discussions about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs factual and focused on the present.** Long-term consequences are too distant to have any meaning. Let your child know that people who drink too much alcohol get sick and throw up, or that smoking makes clothes stink and causes bad breath.
2. **Talk to your kids about the drug-related messages they receive through advertisements, the news media and entertainment sources.** Some TV shows or movies may even glamorize drug use. Remember to ask your kids how they feel about the things they've heard — you'll learn a great deal about what they're thinking.
3. **Consider the following topics when discussing drugs with your child: what alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are like; why drugs are illegal; what harm drugs can do to users.** You should also consider talking about the differences between the medicinal uses and illegal uses of drugs, and how drugs can impact the families and friends of users.
4. **Set clear rules and behave the way you want your kids to behave.** Tell them the reasons for your rules. If you use tobacco or alcohol, be mindful of the message you are sending to your children.
5. **Help your child explore new ways to express their feelings.** Kids who feel shy in one-on-one conversation might open up through painting, writing, or emailing a friend or relative.
6. **Work on problem solving by focusing on the types of problems kids come across.** Help them find long-lasting solutions to homework trouble, a fight with a friend, or in dealing with a bully. Be sure to point out that quick fixes are not long-term solutions.
7. **Give your kids the power to escape from situations that make them feel bad.** Make sure they know that they shouldn't stay in a place that makes them feel uncomfortable or bad about themselves. Also let them know that they don't need to stick with friends who don't support them.
8. **Get to know your child's friends — and their friends' parents.** Check in by phone or a visit once in a while to make sure they are giving their children the same kinds of messages you give your children.
9. **Sign your kids up with community groups or programs that emphasize the positive impact of a healthy lifestyle.** Your drug-free messages will be reinforced — and your kids will have fun, stay active and develop healthy friendships.

**Substances in your K-3 child's world can include:**

Tobacco, Alcohol, Ritalin.

**Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids.** But, when tackling some of life’s tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your child at different ages. (Source: drugfree.org)

## **WHAT TO SAY TO A 5 – 8 YEAR OLD**

**Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids.** But, when tackling some of life’s tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your 5 to 8 year old child.

### **Scenario**

Your child tells you he was offered prescription drugs by a classmate — but said no.

### **What to Say**

After praising your child for making a good choice and for telling you about it, let him know that in the future, he can always blame you to get out of a bad situation. Say, “If you’re ever offered drugs at school, tell that person, ‘My mother would kill me if I took that and then she wouldn’t let me play baseball.’”

### **Scenario**

Your grade-schooler comes home reeking of cigarette smoke. *(YES, this is the age group where most young people report their first exposure / experimenting with cigarette smoking)*

### **What to Say**

I know you’re curious and you wanted to see what smoking was like, but as you can see, it’s pretty disgusting and it probably made you cough and gag a lot. Your clothes and your breath and your hair all stink. Is that how you want to be known? As the kid who stinks?

### **Scenario**

Your child has expressed curiosity about the pills she sees you take every day — and the other bottles in the medicine cabinet.

### **What to Say**

Just because it’s in a family’s medicine cabinet doesn’t mean that it is safe for you to take. Even if your friends say it’s okay, say, “No, my parents won’t let me take something that doesn’t have my name on the bottle.”

### **Scenario**

One in seven teens in America has tried huffing—inhaling the fumes from everyday items like nail polish remover, hair spray, and cooking spray. It’s probably been a while since you’ve talked to your child about the dangers of the products under the kitchen sink—but it’s important to reiterate the warning.

### **What to Say**

I know it’s been a while since I talked to you about the dangers of cleaning products and that they should only be used for cleaning. But I’ve heard that some kids are using them to get high. I just want to let you know that even if your friends say, “Hey, we can buy this stuff at the supermarket so it’s totally okay to sniff it,” it’s not. Inhaling fumes from cleaners or products like cooking spray and nail polish remover is as dangerous as doing all the drugs we’ve talked about, like marijuana.

Now, let’s talk about ways you can get out of the situation if that happens. What do you think you should say? Remember, you can always blame me and say, “My mom would kill me if I tried that!”

# 4th to 6th grades

Preteens: They're on a quest to figure out their place in the world. When it comes to the way they view that world, they tend to give their friends' opinions a great deal of power while, at the same time, they're starting to question their parents' views and messages. Your advice may be challenged — but it will be heard and will stay with your child much more than he or she will ever admit.

Here are 8 tips to help you help your preteen live a healthy, drug-free life:

1. **Make sure your child knows your rules — and that you'll enforce the consequences if rules are broken.** This applies to no-use rules about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs — as well as bedtimes and homework. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.
2. **Act out scenes with your child where people offer her drugs.** Kids who don't know what to say or how to get away are more likely to give in to peer pressure. Let her know that she can always use you as an excuse and say: "No, my mom [or dad, aunt, etc.] will kill me if I smoke a cigarette." Explain why she shouldn't continue friendships with kids who have offered her cigarettes, alcohol or pills.
3. **Tell your child what makes him so special.** Puberty can upend a child's self-esteem. Feelings of insecurity, doubt and pressure may creep in. Offset those feelings with a lot of positive comments about his life and who he is as an individual — and not just when he brings home an A.
4. **Give your children the power to make decisions that go against their peers.** You can reinforce this message through small things such as encouraging your child to pick out the sneakers he likes rather than the pair his four friends have.
5. **Base drug and alcohol messages on facts, not fear.** Kids can't argue with facts but their new need for independence may allow them to get around their fears. Also, kids love to learn facts — both run-of-the-mill and truly odd. For drug and alcohol facts, visit our drug guide. [www.drugfree.org/drug-guide](http://www.drugfree.org/drug-guide)
6. **Preteens aren't concerned with future problems that might result from experimentation with tobacco, alcohol or other drugs, but they are concerned about their appearance — sometimes to the point of obsession.** Tell them about the smelly hair and ashtray breath caused by cigarettes. Make sure they know that it would be hard to perform in the school play while high on marijuana.
7. **Get to know your child's friends — and their friends' parents.** Check in by phone or a visit once in a while to make sure they are giving their children the same kinds of messages you give your children about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.
8. **Help children separate reality from fantasy.** Watch TV and movies with them and ask lots of questions to reinforce the distinction between the two. Remember to include advertising in your discussions, as those messages are especially powerful.

## **Substances in your fourth to sixth grader's world can include:**

Tobacco, Alcohol, Ritalin, Adderall, Inhalants, Marijuana.

**Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids.** But, when tackling some of life's tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your child at different ages. (Source: drugfree.org)

### **What to say to a 9 – 12 year old**

#### **Scenario**

Your child is just starting middle school and you know that eventually, he will be offered drugs and alcohol.

#### **What to Say**

There are a lot of changes ahead of you in middle school. I know we talked about drinking and drugs when you were younger, but now is when they're probably going to be an issue. I'm guessing you'll at least hear about kids who are experimenting, if not find yourself some place where kids are doing stuff that is risky. I just want you to remember that I'm here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the stuff you hear or see. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?

#### **Scenario**

You find out that kids are selling prescription drugs at your child's school. Your child hasn't mentioned it and you want to get the conversation about it started.

#### **What to Say**

Hey, you probably know that parents talk to each other and find things out about what's going on at school... I heard there are kids selling pills – prescriptions that either they are taking or someone in their family takes. Have you heard about kids doing this?

#### **Scenario**

Your child's favorite celebrity—the one he or she really looks up to—has been named in a drug scandal.

#### **What to Say**

I think it must be really difficult to live a celebrity life and stay away from that stuff. Being in the public eye puts a ton of pressure on people, and many turn to drugs because they think drugs will relieve that stress. But a lot of famous people manage to stay clean – like [name others who don't do drugs] – and hopefully this incident is going to help [name of celebrity] straighten out his life. Of course, people make mistakes – the real measure of a person is how accountable he is when he messes up. It will be interesting to see how he turns out, won't it?

The thing is, when a person uses drugs and alcohol—especially a kid because he's still growing—it changes how his brain works and makes him do really stupid things. Most people who use drugs and alcohol need a lot of help to get better. I hope [name] has a good doctor and friends and family members to help him/her.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS.

You've been anticipating this for the past few years — your child's transition from elementary school to middle school. Be warned, this is a critical time and calls for extra vigilance on your part. Your son or daughter may still seem young, but their new surroundings can put them in some mature and tempting situations.

- The likelihood that kids will try drugs increases dramatically during this year. Your child is going to meet lots of new kids, seek acceptance, and start to make more — and bigger — choices. For the first time, your kids will be exposed to older kids who use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. New middle- or junior high-schoolers often think these older students are cool and may be tempted to try drugs to fit in.
- One type of drug in particular to watch out for is inhalants, since they tend to be abused at a very young age. Inhalants are ordinary household products that are inhaled or sniffed by children to get high — but can cause serious brain damage, among other side effects.
- A 2007 study shows that 20 percent of 6th graders have tried inhalants. Another disturbing fact is that from 1998 to 2007, the percent of middle-school students agreeing strongly that sniffing or huffing things to get high can kill you significantly decreased from 61 percent to 54 percent. This is a potential signal of concern because the more risky an adolescent thinks a substance is, the less likely he / she is to abuse it. (Partnership Attitude Tracking Study). Therefore, it's important to be aware of these harmful chemicals and be sure to educate your children on their effects as well.
- To many middle-school kids, peer approval means everything and your child may make you feel unwelcome. He is going through a time where he feels as though he should be able to make his own decisions and may start to challenge your values. While your child may physically and emotionally pull away from you to establish his own identity — and may even seem embarrassed by you at times — he actually needs you to be involved in his life more than ever before.
- Also, be aware that your child is going through some major physical and hormonal changes. Her moods may vary as she tries to come to terms with her ever-changing body and the onset of puberty. Keep yourself educated on what to expect — if you reassure her that nothing is out of the ordinary, your child can relax knowing that what she's going through is normal.

## **Middle School ... continued**

### **To help your child make good choices during this critical time, you should:**

- Make it very clear that you do not want her to use alcohol, tobacco, marijuana or other drugs.
- Find out if he really understands the consequences of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use.
- Get to know her friends by taking them to and from after-school activities, games, the library, and movies (while being sensitive to her need to feel independent). Check in with her friends' parents often to make sure you share the same anti-drug stance.
- Be sure you know his online friends – as well as his other online activities such as websites he visits, with whom he emails, chats and instant messages, his MySpace or Facebook page, and who he text messages.
- Volunteer for activities where you can observe him at school.
- Hold a weekly family meeting to check in with each other and address problems or concerns.
- Get your kids involved with adult-supervised after-school activities.
- Give kids who are unsupervised after school a schedule of activities, limits on their behavior, household chores to accomplish, and a strict phone-in-to-you policy (along with easily accessible snacks).
- Make it easy for your child to leave a situation where alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs are being used.
- Call kids' parents if their home is to be used for a party; get assurance that no alcoholic beverages or illegal substances will be at the party.
- Set curfews and enforce them.
- Encourage open dialogue with your children about their experiences.

# TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR 13 to 15 year old

For parents, this is a pivotal time in helping kids make positive choices when faced with drugs and alcohol. The average age kids try drugs for the first time is 13. If your child is 13, says Amelia Arria, senior scientist with Treatment Research Institute, you should assume that he or she has been offered drugs or alcohol. But you can help your teen stay healthy and drug-free — and beat the negative statistics about drug use among teens. Kids who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are up to 50 percent less likely to use (2011 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study). So, most importantly, stay involved. Young teens may say they don't need your guidance, but they're much more open to it than they'll ever let on. Make sure you talk to them about their choices of friends — drug use in teens starts as a social behavior.

Here are 5 tips to help you guide your teen toward a healthy, drug-free life:

1. **Make sure your teen knows your rules and the consequences for breaking those rules — and, most importantly, that you really will enforce those consequences if the rules are broken.** This applies to no-use rules about tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, as well as curfews and homework. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules. [Guo, Hawkins, Hill, and Abbott (2001)] And kids who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use drugs (Metzler, Rusby & Biglan, 1999).
2. **Let your teen in on all the things you find wonderful about him. He needs to hear a lot of positive comments about his life and who he is as an individual — and not just when he makes the basketball team.** Positive reinforcement can go a long way in preventing drug use among teens.
3. **Show interest — and discuss — your child's daily ups and downs.** You'll earn your child's trust, learn how to talk to each other, and won't take your child by surprise when you voice a strong point of view about drugs.
4. **Tell your teen about the negative effect alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs have on physical appearance.** Teens are extremely concerned with their physical appearance. Tell them about a time you saw a friend or acquaintance get sick from alcohol — reinforce how completely disgusting it was.
5. **Don't just leave your child's anti-drug education up to her school.** Ask your teen what she's learned about drugs in school and then continue with that topic or introduce new topics. A few to consider: the long-term effects that tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs have on the human body; how and why chemical dependence occurs — including the unpredictable nature of dependency and how it varies from person to person; the impact of drug use on society — societal costs of impaired health and loss of productivity; maintaining a healthy lifestyle; positive approaches to stress reduction; or setting realistic short- and long-term goals.

## **Substances in your seventh to ninth grader's world can include:**

Tobacco, Alcohol, prescription drugs such as Ritalin or Adderall, Inhalants, and illicit drugs such as Marijuana, Ecstasy, Herbal Ecstasy, Cocaine/Crack, GHB, Heroin, Rohypnol, Ketamine, LSD, Mushrooms

**Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids.** But, when tackling some of life's tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your child at different ages. (Source: drugfree.org)

## **WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR 13 – 15 year old**

### **Scenario**

Your child is just starting middle school and you know that eventually, he will be offered drugs and alcohol.

### **What to Say**

There are a lot of changes ahead of you in middle school. I know we talked about drinking and drugs when you were younger, but now is when they're probably going to be an issue. I'm guessing you'll at least hear about kids who are experimenting, if not find yourself some place where kids are doing stuff that is risky. I just want you to remember that I'm here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the stuff you hear or see. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?

### **Scenario**

You find out that kids are selling prescription drugs at your child's school. Your child hasn't mentioned it and you want to get the conversation about it started.

### **What to Say**

Hey, you probably know that parents talk to each other and find things out about what's going on at school... I heard there are kids selling pills – prescriptions that either they are taking or someone in their family takes. Have you heard about kids doing this?

### **Scenario**

Your child's favorite celebrity—the one he or she really looks up to—has been named in a drug scandal.

### **What to Say**

I think it must be really difficult to live a celebrity life and stay away from that stuff. Being in the public eye puts a ton of pressure on people, and many turn to drugs because they think drugs will relieve that stress. But a lot of famous people manage to stay clean – like [name others who don't do drugs] – and hopefully this incident is going to help [name of celebrity] straighten out his life. Of course, people make mistakes – the real measure of a person is how accountable he is when he messes up. It will be interesting to see how he turns out, won't it?

The thing is, when a person uses drugs and alcohol — especially a kid because he's still growing — it changes how his brain works and makes him do really stupid things. Most people who use drugs and alcohol need a lot of help to get better. I hope [name] has a good doctor and friends and family members to help him/her.

# TIPS in talking with 16 – 18 year olds

When it comes to drugs, teens are a savvy bunch. Drugs and messages about living drug-free have been part of their lives for years. They can make distinctions not only among different drugs and their effects, but also among trial, occasional use and addiction. They've witnessed many of their peers using drugs — some without obvious or immediate consequences, others whose drug use gets out of control. By the teen years, kids have also had to make plenty of choices of their own about drug use: whether they should give in to peer pressure and experiment with drugs, or go against some of their peers and stay clean.

Here are 6 tips to help you help your teen continue to live a healthy, drug-free life:

1. **Don't speak generally about drug- and alcohol-use— your older teen needs to hear detailed and reality-driven messages.** Topics worth talking about with your teen: using a drug just once can have serious permanent consequences; can put you in risky and dangerous situations; anybody can become a chronic user or addict; combining drugs can have deadly consequences.
2. **Emphasize what drug use can do to your teen's future.** Discuss how drug use can ruin your teen's chance of getting into the college she's been dreaming about or landing the perfect job.
3. **Challenge your child to be a peer leader among his friends and to take personal responsibility for his actions and show others how to do the same.**
4. **Encourage your teen to volunteer somewhere that he can see the impact of drugs on your community.** Teenagers tend to be idealistic and enjoy hearing about ways they can help make the world a better place. Help your teen research volunteer opportunities at local homeless shelters, hospitals or victim services centers.
5. **Use news reports as discussion openers.** If you see a news story about an alcohol-related car accident, talk to your teen about all the victims that an accident leaves in its wake. If the story is about drugs in your community, talk about the ways your community has changed as drug use has grown.
6. **Compliment your teen for the all the things he does well and for the positive choices he makes.** Let him know that he is seen and appreciated. And let him know how you appreciate what a good role model he is for his younger siblings and other kids in the community. Teens still care what their parents think. Let him know how deeply disappointed you would be if he started using drugs.

## **Drugs in your teen's world can include:**

Tobacco, Alcohol, prescription drugs such as Ritalin, Oxycontin, Vicodin, Valium and Xanax, Inhalants, Marijuana, Ecstasy, Herbal Ecstasy, Cocaine/Crack, GHB, Heroin, Rohypnol, Ketamine, LSD, Mushrooms.

**Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids.** But, when tackling some of life's tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your child at different ages. (Source: drugfree.org)

## **WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR 16 – 18 year old.**

### **Scenario**

Your teen is starting high school — and you want to remind him that he doesn't have to give in to peer pressure to drink or use drugs.

### **What to Say**

You must be so excited about starting high school... it's going to be a ton of fun, and we want you to have a great time. But we also know there's going to be some pressure to start drinking, smoking pot or taking other drugs. A lot of people feel like this is just what high school kids do. But not all high school kids drink! Many don't, which means it won't make you weird to choose not to drink, either. You can still have a lot of fun if you don't drink. You'll have a lot of decisions to make about what you want to do in high school and you might even make some mistakes. Just know that you can talk to us about anything — even if you DO make a mistake. We won't freak out. We want you to count on us to help you make smart decisions and stay safe, okay?

### **Scenario**

Every time you ask your teen how his day was, you get a mumbled, "Whatever, it was okay," in return.

### **What to Say**

Skip asking general questions like "How's school?" every day. Instead, ask more specific questions on topics that interest both you and your teen ("Tell me about the pep rally yesterday." "Are there a lot of cliques in your school?" "Fill me in on your Chemistry lab test.") You can also use humor and even some gentle sarcasm to get the conversation flowing. Try, "Oh, what a joy it is to live with a brooding teenager!" to make your child laugh and start opening up a bit.

### **Scenario**

Your high-schooler comes home smelling of alcohol or cigarette smoke for the first time.

### **What to Say**

"The response should be measured, quiet and serious—not yelling, shouting or overly emotional," says parenting expert Marybeth Hicks. "Your child should realize that this isn't just a frustrating moment like when he doesn't do a chore you asked for; it's very big, very important, and very serious."

Say, "I'm really upset that you're smoking/drinking. I need to get a handle on how often this has been happening and what your experiences have been so far. I get that you're worried about being in trouble, but the worst part of that moment is over — I know that you're experimenting. The best thing you can do now is really be straight with me, so for starters, tell me about what happened tonight..."

### **Scenario**

Your teen has started to hang out with kids you don't know — and dropped his old friends.

### **What to Say**

It seems like you are hanging with a different crowd than you have in the past. Is something up with your usual friends? Is there a problem with [old friends' names] or are you just branching out and meeting some new kids? Tell me about your new friends. What are they like? What do they like to do? What do you like about them?

# IF YOU THINK THEY'RE USING: DRUG ABUSE IN TEENS 13-18

If you're at all concerned that your teenager is using drugs or alcohol, take action right now to help your child get back on track to a healthy life.

- **Look for the warning signs of drug or alcohol use or addiction.** Keep in mind: Most of these symptoms tend to be gradual so you need to watch for them over time. Don't jump to conclusions, but do investigate any suspicions you have as fully as possible. Trust your intuition. Please note: Many of the warning signs for teen drug abuse are the same as those for depression or for the ups and downs of being a teenager. There's also the possibility it's a physical or emotional problem.
- **Talk to your teen about drug abuse without going on the attack.** Also, don't try to talk with your child if he or she seems under the influence. Wait for a calm moment and then explain the behavior you're worried about. Don't do all the talking; give your child the chance to explain his behavior.
- **Ask a doctor, mental health professional, or a professional substance abuse counselor for help if your teen seems evasive or if his or her explanations are not convincing.** This



step will help you rule out physical or mental illness. If your child is using, a health professional skilled in diagnosing adolescents with alcohol or drug problems will help you figure out the best addiction intervention program for your teen's needs. Programs for teen drug abuse come in many types including self-help, outpatient, in-patient, and 24-hour hospitalization programs. To find treatment programs in your area, call your family doctor, local hospital, county mental health society, or school counselor for a referral. You can also call 800-662-HELP (800-662-4357) or the Partnership's Bilingual Helpline (1-855-DRUGFREE)

**Get your family the help it needs.** Consider personal or family counseling. Live or online support groups will help you move forward and teach you how to help your teen through recovery and into the future and most groups are offered in Spanish. Also, Al-Anon and Alateen are support groups that help families and friends of people with alcohol problems recover from the effects of living with a problem drinker — whether the person is still drinking or not. More than likely, someone at an Al-Anon meeting knows of a counselor who specializes in substance use disorders.



# TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR 19 – 25 year old

As you prepare your child for life after high school you can help guide him to a healthy experience. And you don't have to tread on his independence to do it. You let him know you have his back," says Amelia Arria, Senior Scientist at Treatment Research Institute. This doesn't mean he doesn't have responsibilities of his own, or that he isn't responsible for making his own bed or contributing to the household.

## Wrapping Up High School

- Ideally, you've already been talking to your kids about drugs and alcohol during middle school and high school. Research shows students who drank in high school are three times more likely to begin heavy episodic drinking in college [Weitzman, Nelson & Wechsler (2003)].
- Don't buy into the myth that allowing teens to drink around you will help them deal with alcohol issues when they're on their own. Research shows that, no matter who they drink with in high school, "they'll sustain and increase their drinking level" in college, says Arria.

## Off to College



Make sure you keep an open line of communication with them. "It's not all about the topic of drinking and drug use," says Arria. "It's about maintaining that really supportive relationship." Your child needs to know that if any problems or difficult situations arise, she can turn to you for help. Be an at-home resource for your college student.

Don't want to come across as over-protective? "I do think the quality of the parent-child relationship has to change but I don't think [parents have] to back off," says Arria. "Rather than asking about her friends, you might be asking about her classes and what she's interested in."

Stay alert to possible mental health issues. "Between the ages of 18 and 25 are when a lot of things pop up, if they haven't already in adolescence, like anxiety disorders," says Arria. There is a strong link between mental and physical health issues and the use of drugs and alcohol. Just in case something does happen, make sure you know what campus mental health resources are available to your child.

## Prescription Drugs in the Dorms and in your child's post high school life

While the most popular drugs on college campuses are alcohol and marijuana, non-medical use of prescription stimulants, analgesics (painkillers), and tranquilizers is on the rise [McCabe, West, & Wechsler (2007)]. Though prescription drugs do have an important role when prescribed by a doctor, unsupervised use of them can be extremely harmful. While some parents turn a blind eye because they think the drugs may help their child do better in school, this is something you definitely want to disapprove of. Keep in mind:

- Abusing painkillers is like abusing heroin because both drugs' ingredients (both are opioids) are very similar.
- Many pills look pretty much the same, but depending on the drug and the dosage the effects can vary greatly from mild to lethal.
- "Non-medical use of prescription drugs is actually associated with decreased academic performance, not an increase," says Arria. She adds that there also seems to be "a strong relationship between the use of other drugs and non-medical use of prescription stimulants." Researchers believe that students get into a cycle of spending a lot of time with friends, doing drugs and drinking, instead of going to classes. Then they turn to prescription stimulants to help them get through. The combination does not work. For more information, visit The Medicine Abuse Project at [medicineabuseproject.org](http://medicineabuseproject.org).

## **Young Adult.. Continued**

### **Drugs in your college post-high school-aged child's world can include:**

Tobacco, Alcohol, prescription drugs such as Ritalin, Oxycontin, Vicodin, Valium or Xanax, and illicit drugs such as Marijuana, Cocaine, Methamphetamine, Heroin. Inhalants, Marijuana, Ecstasy, Herbal Ecstasy, Cocaine/Crack, GHB, Heroin, Rohypnol, Ketamine, LSD, Mushrooms.

**Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their young adults.** But, when tackling some of life's tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your 19 to 25 year old.

### **Scenario**

Your adult child is moving to her own apartment or into a college dorm

#### **What to Say**

I know you're off to start your own life but please know that I'm always here for you. I respect that you're old enough to make your own choices, but if you ever want another perspective on things, give a shout. I'll try my hardest to help you out without judging you for your decisions. Sound good?

Amelia Arria, senior research scientist at the Treatment Research Institute, also suggests: There are certain things that you can count on in life and one of the things you're going to be able to count on is me. As your parent, I am always here for you. Remember, I am your support. I'm the one who can guide you.

### **Scenario**

After watching a movie portraying drug use together, you want to gauge your adult child's opinion on drugs.

#### **What to Say**

I know you're going to think that I'm over-protective or meddling, and I'm sorry. But that movie really disturbed me and I just have to ask: is there a lot of drug use at your college/in your new town? Do the new friends that you've made dabble in drugs at all? How do you feel about it?

# IF YOU THINK THEY'RE USING: YOUNG ADULTS 19-25

The most important step you can take in addiction intervention for an adult is to speak up and urge him or her to get help. This is especially crucial if you notice any of the early signs of alcohol or drug dependence, like excessive use and/or drinking at inappropriate times or places (e.g., during work or while playing sports), or if they have suffered negative consequences as a result of use, such as absenteeism from classes or work, or arrests.

Don't try to determine the severity of your child's substance problem yourself — urge him or her to get help as quickly as possible. As you go through the process of helping your child, keep in mind:

- If your child is experiencing medical or legal crises, point to these as examples that show the extent of the problem. When the acute impacts of the crisis have been alleviated, talk about the need for help. In these situations, help has a very good chance of being accepted.
- Resist the urge to enable the substance use to continue by rescuing your child from the negative consequences without pressuring him to seek help. People often decide to change their behavior because they experience painful crises. If you rescue your child, you will reduce the impact of those experiences. Do not tell lies to cover for your child's behavior. Do not let your son stay at your home when he's been thrown out of his home. Do not explain to your daughter's boss that her belligerent behavior is not really "her" but caused by "stress."
- You need to set boundaries. If you think your child has a substance use problem, you can start setting limits by not allowing drinking or drug use around you. Be clear about what behavior you will and will not tolerate. Don't be afraid to set clear rules including 1) Do not come to my home drunk, high, or with drugs on you. 2) If you visit us when you are high, we will not let you in. 3) None of your friends can come here drunk, high, or with drugs on them. 4) If you or your friends refuse to leave, we'll call the police.
- Tell your child that you won't accept verbal promises and that he must take positive action to back up his words.
- Get support for yourself. Al-anon and/or professional help can help give you the confidence to take a firm stand with your child — and maintain it for the long haul. Also, support will help you take care of yourself — one of the most important steps you can take to help your son or daughter.

## **How to Get Treatment**

If your child agrees to treatment, or even agrees to consider it, make connections with a treatment center right away. Have phone numbers for alcohol and drug counseling services, physicians who are knowledgeable about alcoholism and drug dependence, local hospitals that treat alcoholics and addicts, and Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous available and ready.

You may have to be the one to choose the treatment. This task may seem daunting, but remember: there are no “right” or “wrong” choices, and any health care professional with knowledge of substance use disorders can help you. To find treatment programs in your area, call your family doctor, local hospital, county mental health society, or school counselor for a referral. You can also call 800-662-HELP (800-662-4357) or do a search on the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator.

Don't stop there. Remember that agreeing to treatment is only the first step toward getting well. Your child will need your direct support and steady involvement every step of the way if he or she is to get well.

## **If Your Child Refuses Treatment**

If your adult child refuses to go for treatment immediately, show your willingness to do anything to help your child get treatment in the future. For example, you can say: “I will go with you to Twelve Step meetings. I will go with you to meet with a physician, counselor, social worker or family therapist. I will be involved in whatever way the treatment program thinks I could be of most help.”

If all else fails, you may need to withdraw financial and emotional support or end all contact with your child. Let your child know that you will always be available when he or she decides to get help.