

## Keeping Kids Drug Free

### PARENTS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN THE CHOICES THEIR CHILDREN MAKE.

When children know their parents disapprove of using tobacco, alcohol or drugs, they are much less likely to experiment. Do your children know how you feel about these issues?

Most parents find it difficult to talk to their kids about smoking, drinking and using drugs, but substance abuse education should begin at home long before children enter a classroom. Open communication with your children is key to keeping them drug free. It is important to start talking with your children early and to continue emphasizing strong values throughout their teenage years. Here are some tips to help you address substance abuse with your children from an early age.

#### AGES 5 – 8

Children of this age need rules to guide their behavior and information to make good choices. They are eager to please and still look to parents for their opinions. Let your children know how you feel about drugs.

As kids spend more time out in the world, at school and with their friends, they begin to gather messages from lots of new places. They are also more aware of what they hear and read in advertisements, on television and in the movies. Children will need your help as they try to make sense of all that new information.

- ▶ Model good listening skills by paying attention, allowing your child to speak without being interrupted and repeating back to your children what they said to be sure you understood.
- ▶ Practice ways to say “no” with your children by describing situations that may make them uncomfortable, such as someone inviting them to ride their bikes in an area you have set as off-limits or someone asking them for help to cheat on a test.

#### AGES 9 – 11

As children enter the preteen years, they become very interested in factual information and how things work. They value their friends’ opinions much more and they need to feel accepted by peers. Children need a clear no-use message, factual information and strong motivation to resist peer pressure.

Children will copy the behavior of their parents. It is hard for children to listen to their parents tell them not to drink or smoke when they see their parents doing it. While children can understand and accept that there are differences between what adults may legally do and what is appropriate and legal for children, do not let your children be involved in your drinking by mixing you a cocktail or bringing you a beer. Never allow your child to have sips of your alcoholic drink.

- ▶ Teach your kids what to say if they are offered drugs or alcohol by someone. “No thanks, I’m not into that.”
- ▶ Prepare yourself with the facts so you are able to answer questions about alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

#### AGES 12 – 14

Since fitting in with peers matters now more than ever, kids are easily influenced by what their friends feel is suitable behavior and are exposed more and more to drugs and drug use. Talking to your child about the direct unpleasant consequences of tobacco and marijuana use, such as bad breath, smelly hair or clothes or yellow teeth, will be more valuable than discussing the long-term consequences. Kids in this age group are more likely to see older kids doing drugs without seeing immediate consequences, so they are less likely to believe a “black-and-white” statement that drugs are bad.

Kids this age are establishing their own sense of identity; counteract peer influence with parent influence and let them know:

- ▶ Alcohol and drugs can cause them to make poor decisions that can prevent them from being accepted into college, being accepted by the military or being hired for certain jobs.
- ▶ Alcohol and drugs harm judgment and coordination—give real examples, such as consequences from having unprotected sex or being involved in a car accident that causes permanent injury.



## WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

Staying informed about commonly used drugs can help parents talk to their children about staying safe and drug-free.

**ALCOHOL** Alcohol affects the central nervous system and brain. It can make users loosen up, relax, and feel more comfortable, or it can make them more aggressive. Unfortunately, it also lowers their inhibitions, which can set them up for embarrassing or dangerous behavior. In fact, each year approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking.

**TOBACCO AND NICOTINE** Nicotine, the main drug in tobacco, is one of the most heavily used addictive drugs in the United States. Nicotine is highly addictive and acts as both a stimulant and a sedative to the central nervous system. Exposure to these harmful drugs has been known to cause lung cancer, bronchial disease, emphysema, cardiovascular disease, respiratory problems and sudden infant death. Research also shows that youth who smoke cigarettes are fourteen times more likely to try marijuana as those who don't.

Youth are using **E-CIGARETTES** more than any other tobacco product, and when they do, they're probably using JUUL. Chances are pretty good that your child or children know what vaping is, have seen someone vaping, or have friends or classmates that vape. There's no question that movies, music and TV affect teens' choices, but research from the CDC tells us that parents actually have the greatest influence when it comes to tobacco use.

**MARIJUANA** The marijuana of today is stronger than ever before. More teens are in treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependence than for all other illegal drugs combined. Smoking marijuana leads to changes in the brain that are similar to those caused by cocaine, heroin, or alcohol. It affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time, many of the skills required for safe driving and other tasks. Marijuana can also lead to bad grades, broken friendships, family problems, trouble with the law, etc.

**COCAINE** The major ways of taking cocaine are sniffing or snorting, injecting and smoking. Health risks exist regardless of whether cocaine is inhaled, injected or smoked. These risks include: the collapse of the nasal septum, paranoia, aggression, anxiety, seizures and cardiac arrest. When combined with alcohol, there is an increased risk of sudden death.

**HEROIN** Today's heroin is so pure, users can inject it, smoke it or snort it, causing more kids under 18 to use it. No matter which way it is used, heroin causes severe effects on the human body. Heroin abuse is associated with serious health conditions that include: fatal overdose, spontaneous abortion, liver disease, collapsed veins, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

**INHALANTS AND HUFFING** Inhalants are common products found right in the home and are among the most popular and deadly substances kids abuse. Inhalant abuse can result in death from the very first use. According to the annual Monitoring the Future national poll, approximately one in six children will use inhalants by eighth grade. The same report notes that inhalants are most popular with younger teens. Teens use inhalants by sniffing or "snorting" fumes from containers;



## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEEN

One of the most important things parents can do is talk to their kids. Before you do, though, take the time to learn about the substances they may be offered and the dangers of substance use and abuses for youth. Talking to pre-teens and teens is sometimes easier said than done, right? Here are some tips for talking to your kids:



### FIND THE RIGHT TIME TO TALK.

The sooner you start talking, the better. Bring up the subject when you see it on TV, in movies, or in magazines.



**BE DIRECT.** Say, "I don't want you to use drugs." Tell them your reasons. They'll appreciate your honesty and guidance.



**TALK ABOUT THE REAL FACTS.** Just saying "Vaping is bad for you!" isn't enough. Young people are more likely to listen if you give them facts. Don't just talk about substances in general – give them facts about the dangers of drug use and abuse.



### FOCUS ON THE SOCIAL ISSUES.

Young people may care more about the social implications of substance abuse rather than about the health risks. Help them understand the financial costs as well. Remind them that most teenagers do not smoke, use drugs and drink alcohol.



**TEACH THEM TO SAY NO.** Help them to think of what to say if they are offered drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, etc. Practice with them. Pretend you are a classmate asking them to participate. Ask them to come up with several responses and teach them when to walk away. Remember to praise their efforts.

Along with sitting down to talk, one of the best things you can do to help your kids is to set a positive example by being drug- and tobacco-free.

spraying aerosols directly into the mouth or nose; bagging, (inhaling a substance inside a paper or plastic bag), huffing from an inhalant-soaked rag; or inhaling from balloons filled with nitrous oxide. Hazards associated with huffing include: hearing loss, brain damage, blood oxygen depletion, limb spasms and depression.

**CLUB DRUGS** Club drugs are being used by young adults at all-night dance parties such as “raves” or “trances,” dance clubs, and bars. MDMA (Ecstasy), GHB, Rohypnol, ketamine, methamphetamine, and LSD are known to be some of the club or party drugs. It is likely that club drug use can cause a variety of behavioral and cognitive consequences as well as impair memory. Some of the physical effects include dilated pupils, higher body temperature, increased heart rate and blood pressure, sweating, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, dry mouth and tremors.

**PAINKILLERS** Painkillers are drugs commonly prescribed for pain and are only legally available by prescription. Brand names include: Vicodin, Tylenol with Codeine, OxyContin, and Percocet. Painkiller abuse can be dangerous, even deadly with too high a dose or when taken with other drugs, like alcohol. Short-term effects of painkiller abuse may include drowsiness, inability to concentrate, apathy, lack of energy, constriction of the pupils, flushing of the face and neck, constipation, nausea, vomiting, and most significantly, respiratory depression. If a teen abuses painkillers for a period of time, he can become addicted to the drug and experience withdrawal symptoms when he stops taking the drug. Associated with addiction is tolerance, which means more and more of the drug, or a combination of drugs, is needed to produce the same high or euphoric feeling, possibly leading to overdose.

## Preventing Prescription Drug Abuse and Misuse

Think about your home. What prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs do you have? Where are they kept? Would you know if some are missing?

Some prescription drugs like Adderall and Ritalin, along with central nervous system depressants like Xanax and Valium are being abused and misused by youth seeking to stay awake for long periods of time or overnight. These drugs can have serious side effects and even long term brain damage and should not be consumed by anyone without a prescription. The good news is that you can take steps immediately to limit access to these drugs and help keep your teen drug-free.



**1. Safeguard all drugs at home.** Monitor quantities and control access. Take note of how many pills are in a bottle or pill packet, and keep track of refills. This goes for your own medication, as well as for your teen and other members of your household. If your teen has been prescribed a drug, be sure you control the medication and monitor dosages and refills.

**2. Set clear rules for teens about all drug use,** including not sharing medicine and always following the medical provider’s advice and dosages. Make sure your teen uses prescription drugs only as directed by a medical provider and follows instructions for OTC products carefully. This includes taking the proper dosage and not using with other substances without a medical provider’s approval. If you have any questions about how to take a drug, call your family physician or pharmacist.

**3. Be a good role model by following these same rules with your own medicines.** Examine your own behavior to ensure you set a good example. If you misuse your prescription drugs, such as share them with your kids, or abuse them, your teen will notice. Avoid sharing your drugs and always follow your medical provider’s instructions.

**4. Properly conceal and dispose of old or unneeded medicines in the trash.** Unneeded prescription drugs should be hidden and thrown away in the trash. To discourage teens or others from taking them out of the trash, you can mix them with an undesirable substance (like used coffee grounds or kitty litter) and put the mixture in an empty can or bag. Unless the directions say otherwise, do NOT flush medications down the drain or toilet because the chemicals can pollute the water supply. Also, remove any personal, identifiable information from prescription bottles or pill packages before you throw them away.

**5. Ask friends and family to safeguard their prescription drugs as well.** Make sure your friends and relatives, especially grandparents, know about the risks too. Encourage them to regularly monitor their own medicine cabinets. If there are other households your teen has access to, talk to those families as well about the importance of safeguarding medications. If you don’t know the parents of your child’s friends, then make an effort to get to know them, and get on the same page about rules and expectations for use of all drugs, including alcohol and illicit drugs. Follow up with your teen’s school administration to find out what they are doing to address the issue of prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse in schools.

Talk to your teen about the dangers of abusing prescription and over-the-counter drugs. These are powerful drugs that, when abused, can be just as dangerous as street drugs. Tell your teen the risks far outweigh any “benefits.”



## ADDITIONAL TIPS

- ▶ Eat dinner together on a regular basis to stay connected with your kids and communicate your family values. Among teen-agers who eat dinner with their parents six or seven times a week, 93 percent have not smoked a cigarette in the last month and have not attended drinking parties in the last six months.
- ▶ Let your children know that you do not approve of them trying drugs, alcohol or tobacco. Set clear expectations and be consistent in enforcing consequences.
- ▶ Educate yourself on the names of drugs and the effects they have on a person so you can give your children the facts. Giving them misleading information will only discredit you as a source of information on these topics.
- ▶ If your children come home from school with information about Keeping Kids Drug Free, ask them about it and reinforce the message at home. More importantly, listen to what your children have to say.
- ▶ Promote positive decision-making. Letting your children make age-appropriate decisions will help them feel good about themselves and the choices they make. This will help your children develop self-confidence, which will help them reject peer pressure.
- ▶ Be involved in your children's lives. Get to know their friends, their friends' parents, who they hang out with and what they talk about. Work with the parents of your children's friends to set up rules about curfews, unchaperoned parties and other social activities.

For more information and tips, visit [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org).

*Information gathered from: Parents. The Anti-Drug. Sponsored by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign.*

## E-CIGARETTES

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), last year, more than 3.6 million U.S. youth, including 1 in 5 high school students and 1 in 20 middle school students, used electronic cigarettes, also known as “e-cigarettes.” Between 2017 and 2018, e-cigarette use increased 78% among high school students and nearly 50% among middle school students. This rapid increase led the U.S. Surgeon General to call the use of these products by youth an epidemic in the United States. In adolescents, exposure to nicotine can harm brain development, which continues until about age 25.

E-cigarettes are now the most commonly used tobacco product among youth and that many youth aren't aware of the dangers of these products, including the negative impacts of nicotine exposure on the developing adolescent brain. Therefore, ensuring that youth are aware of the risks of using all forms of tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, is critical. Parents can set a positive example by being tobacco free and ensuring that their kids aren't exposed to the secondhand emissions from any tobacco products, including e-cigarettes.

## HERE'S HELP

Use the **Family Resources on pages 72–78** to learn about a variety of family support services available in your community.