

THE TIME BETWEEN CHOOSING YOUR WORDS & USING YOUR WORDS.



Preventing Teen Drug Use - How to Talk With Your Teen

Talking with teens can be challenging. Having meaningful, ongoing conversations about drugs and alcohol, however, is key to helping keep your son or daughter healthy and safe. Here are some tips from The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids that can be helpful with those important conversations.

Choose a Good Time & Place

- **Look for blocks of time to talk.** After dinner, before bed, before school or on the way to or from school and extracurricular activities can work well.
- **Take a walk or go for a drive together.** With less eye contact, your teen won't feel like he's under a microscope.

Approach Your Talk with Openness, Active Listening & "I" Statements

- **Keep an open mind.** If you want to have a productive conversation with your teen, try to keep an open mind and remain curious and calm. That way, your child is more likely to be receptive to what you have to say.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** For a more engaging conversation, you'll want to get more than just a "yes" or "no" response from your child.
- **Use active listening.** Let your teen know he or she is understood by reflecting back what you hear — either verbatim or just the sentiment. It works like this: You listen without interrupting (no matter what), then sum up what you've heard to allow him or her to confirm. Try these phrases:



"It seems like you're feeling..."
"I hear you say you're feeling..."
"Am I right that you're feeling..."

Use "I" statements to keep the flow going. "I" statements let you express yourself without your teenager feeling judged, blamed or attacked. You describe his behavior, how you feel about it and how it affects you. Then you spell out what you need. Like this:

- "When you don't come home on time, I worry that something terrible has happened. What I need is for you to call me as soon as you know you're going to be late so that I know you're okay."
- "I feel like you can't hear what I have to say when you're so mad. Then I get frustrated. I need to talk about this later when we're both able to listen."
- "Because I love you and I want to keep you safe, I worry about you going to the concert. I need to know that you will obey our rules about not drinking or using drugs."

"I" statements allow you to use persuasion (not control or blame) to cause a change in his behavior. You also allow him to help decide what happens next — another key to bonding.

Understand Your Influence as a Parent

Keep in mind that teens say that when it comes to drugs and alcohol, their parents are the most important influence. That's why it's important to talk — and listen — to your teen. So, try to talk. A lot.

Understand Your Influence as a Parent (Continued)

- **Discuss the negative effects of drugs and alcohol.** Clearly communicate that you do not want your teen using drugs. Talk about the short- and long-term effects drugs and alcohol can have to his or her mental and physical health, safety and ability to make good decisions. Explain to your child that experimenting with drugs or alcohol during this time is risky to their still-developing brain.



Parents, you are the biggest influence in your teen's life. Kids who say they learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are significantly less likely to use drugs.

- **Ask your child what might happen if he or she does use drugs or alcohol.** This gets your teen to think about her future, what her boundaries are around substance use – and some possible negative consequences (she may be late to practice, do something stupid in front of her friends, have a hangover). It will also give you insight into what's important to her.
- **Take advantage of "teachable moments."** Use every day events in your life to point out things you'd like your child to know about. Point out alcohol and drug-related situations in celebrity headlines, or stories going on your own community that show the consequences of alcohol and drug use. If you and your child are at the park and see a group of kids drinking, use the moment to talk about the negative effects of alcohol. When watching TV together, ask if the shows and advertising make drug use look acceptable and routine? Or do they show its downside? How did that program make your child feel about drugs?
- **If there is a history of addiction or alcoholism in your family,** then your child has a much greater risk of developing a problem. Be aware of this elevated risk and discuss it with your child regularly, as you would with any disease. Learn about other risks and why teens use.

Offer Empathy & Support

- **Offer empathy and compassion.** Let your child know you understand. The teen years can be tough. Acknowledge that everyone struggles sometimes, but drugs and alcohol are not a useful or healthy way to cope with problems. Let your child know that he/she can trust you.
- **Remind your child that you are there for support and guidance** – and that it's important to you that she/he is healthy, happy and makes safe choices.

Keep in Mind Your Teen's Brain is Still Developing

- **The human brain doesn't fully develop until about age 25.** This helps to explain a lot about the way your teen communicates. Because the prefrontal cortex isn't mature, your child may have a terrible time interpreting facial expressions. (You may feel surprised, but he or she thinks you're angry.) Add that to impulsivity (over-reactive amygdala) and limited emotional control, and you've got a recipe for major communication problems. Once you learn to recognize typical teen behavior, you can control your automatic reactions to it and communicate more clearly.
- **Typical teen behavior can trigger a lot of emotion in parents.** Identifying the behavior you see in your teen can help you manage our own impulses; we avoid giving our teens control. Plus, we communicate better because our messages aren't clouded by emotion.
- **Learn to spot typical teen behavior so you won't over-react.** Once you know that brain development can affect teen behavior in some pretty bizarre ways, you may see your teen in a new light. Start keeping a list of the things your teen does that make you feel frustrated, impatient, angry or threatened. (Include specific words, emotions, gestures and body language.) Writing things down will make it easier for you recognize the same scene later and say, "I'm not falling into this trap again." Pay attention to yourself. What happens when your teen mouths off? Does your heart race? Do your cheeks burn? Does your neck get stiff? These are the warning signs of a gut reaction. As soon as you feel the cues, take a deep breath (or three) or take a break to cool down. Before you do, though, set a time when you'll both come back and continue talking.