

Talking to your teen about alcohol and drugs

Ways to Start Conversations:

- Consider sharing your experiences (as teaching opportunities)
- Use articles, music, news and shows as starting points
- It's okay to say that you need to tell them something (lecture) for 2 minutes and you just need them to listen
- Use their need for your permission (for example to go to a party) as a chance to have discussions (how will you handle yourself, how to keep your friends safe, etc.)

Questions:

- What have you heard from your peers about (marijuana/alcohol)?
- Have you ever known or heard about anyone who drank too much alcohol and ended up really sick, or in a difficult/challenging situation because of their alcohol use? What happened? What could you do if you were in a situation like this?
- What do you consider the difference between: abstinence, experimentation, social/recreational use, habitual use, abuse and addiction? Where do you think most teens fall on the line?
- What might be some of the signs or how would you know if someone you cared about was struggling with a substance use problem? What would you say or do? Is help available at school or in the community? What help is available that you know of? How would you want someone to handle this with you?
- What are some of the reasons why a teenager might use drugs or alcohol? Do you think they are ever used to escape from difficult emotions or to fit in with others?
- Are there circumstances where you feel it is okay for teens to use or try drugs and/or alcohol? What are some examples of those circumstances.
- Who could you turn to if you were afraid for yourself and your own substance use?

Questions to ask to help our kids develop agency:

- What goals do you have that substances could interfere with?
- If you ended up addicted, how might that impact your life?
- Why would you want to use substances?
- What do you get out of using substances?
- What are you afraid of about your use right now?
- How does using substances hurt you?

Phrases to use when talking to your kids after they've told you something that you are concerned about, after they mess up or after they ask you something you aren't comfortable with:

- "Tell me more..."
- "Help me to understand..."
- "Can you explain what your thinking was when..."
- "I'd like a little time to think about this, let's talk after we both have a chance to sleep on it."

Things you can say to help them to learn from their choices:

- What could you have done that may have led to a better outcome?
- Did you have a little voice that told you not to do this?
- Was there a time when you could have made a different choice?
- How did it feel when you decided to do x?
- Explain your thought process when...
- Do think it was a good call when your friend did...?

Get Creative!

- Timing is everything
- Email them
- Text them
- Put Post It Notes on their door
- Use silly code-words that mean something to your family to remind them of your values and expectation, or to remind them that you love them and are always there
- Speak their language
 - If they are more thinkers – ask them what they think
 - If they are more feelers – ask them how they felt
 - Short and sweet

Tips and Strategies

- Don't ask your kids "who" when they tell you about their friends – it puts them in a bad situation – they don't want to betray their friend's trust but they may need your help
- Use "I statements" vs. lecturing
- Own up to your mistakes (they will feel permission to tell you about theirs)
- Be available to talk when they want to – even at 11pm
- When you feel like you might react more angrily than you want:
 - Take a breath
 - Say "tell me more"
 - You can always take time and talk about it later
 - It's okay to say no and set boundaries
- Never deal with the situation when they are under the influence
- Consider the impact of being too punitive (going underground)

Role Play and Topics to Discuss

- Strategies to say no when offered
- What to do if your ride is drunk (or high)
- How to pretend to drink when you aren't
- What to do when a "few friends" turns into a party
- How to handle if people come to your home uninvited
- How to keep your friends safe

Don't forget to:

- Stay in the game - don't disengage!
- Help them to find more purpose in meaning in their lives outside of grades, sports achievements, and partying.
- Remind them that you know that this is their life, they get to choose what they do and also that the consequences are real.
- Be curious about your kids and make sure they know that you love them for who they are and that you will always love them even if they mess up. We think that's obvious, but our kids often feel like we only love them if they act like perfect angels.

Marijuana Talk Kit online: <https://drugfree.org/download/marijuana-talk-kit/>