



## Teens and Drugs

### The Facts

Experts say the age at which children start using drugs, alcohol and tobacco has been dropping steadily. The average age of youngsters who try tobacco is 10. Kids who drink alcohol begin at around age 11, and marijuana smoking starts about age 13. The younger a youngster is when he begins to use drugs, the greater the risk to develop other problems associated with drug use, such as school failure, unplanned or unprotected sex, acts of violence and driving accidents.

Research has shown that parental involvement makes a critical difference in children's lives. Parents can influence their children if they reach them early and if they continue to reinforce strong values throughout adolescence.

### How to talk about drugs

#### Begin an ongoing dialogue

Some parents assume that when their child reaches a certain age, it's time to sit down and have a 'drug talk.' A better approach is to begin early and talk often. Explain the difference between legal drugs, used for medical purposes, and illegal drugs, used for fun.

#### Teach kids how to say "no"

Peer pressure is massive, and grows as kids enter adolescence. Help your children practice how to refuse drugs in a way that fits their personality. *Example:* "No thanks, I don't want to fry my brains," or "I've signed a no drug agreement with my coach."

#### Put your past drug use to rest

It's not uncommon for some parents to experience inner conflict about the topic of drugs if they used them during adolescence. It's important to keep in mind that drugs today are more prevalent, more potent, and lead to more promiscuous behavior and violence at younger ages than in the past. The consequences, such as sexual transmitted diseases (STD's) and HIV, are also greater.

#### Teach about consequences

Make clear rules and enforce them with love, firmness and consistency. Let kids know that you don't want them using



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#### Teach about consequences

Make clear rules and enforce them with love, firmness and consistency. Let kids know that you don't want them using

alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs. Children at all ages need boundaries. Don't be afraid to establish a clear family policy.

### **Be a role model**

If your kids see you drinking or taking drugs, that will undermine your well-intentioned discussions. If anyone in your household uses drugs and alcohol as a regular coping mechanism, they are also sending clear messages to your kids. Think about what you're modeling for your children and have candid talks about addiction from an early age.

### **Use teachable moments**

Catalysts for teachable moments can be found on television, in the newspaper, or an event that occurs at school. *Example:* If you're watching a program in which the characters are smoking marijuana you can initiate a conversation by asking, "Do you know what they are smoking?" or "Tell me what you know about the effects of marijuana?" Ask your kids for their opinions and listen to their concerns. Conversations such as these can provide non-threatening ways to clarify misinformation and reinforce your values.

### **Become media literate**

Movies, television and music saturate kids with distorted messages about drugs, alcohol and tobacco--often making them seem cool. You can counteract these messages through informal discussions. Point out that in real life these behaviors lead to painful consequences. The intention of media is to make money, not protect children.

### **Encourage healthful activities**

Involve your children in appealing extra-curricular activities and after school programs or sports. Kids with unsupervised time and little to do are more likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol.

### **Listen and watch**

Be aware of where your kids are and with whom they associate. Notice changes in personality, academic performance, friends or a downslide in appearance. Paraphernalia such as butane lighters, pipes, rolling papers or eyedroppers are a few signs of potential drug use. If you sense the signs of drug use, seek help from professionals.

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