

Talking to Your Kids About Substance Use

Parents are the #1 influence in a young person's decision to make healthy choices.

Having early and ongoing age-appropriate conversations with your child will have an impact on their future!

UNDER AGE 5

Discuss being healthy and making good choices

- Encourage them to exercise, eat well and get plenty of sleep
- Tell them to avoid dangerous substances in their environment, such as cleaning products and medications
- Talk about how we only take medication when we need it and should only take it when given by a trusted adult (parent, caregiver or doctor)

AGES 5-8

Educate them about various substances and reinforce caring for their bodies

- Look for teachable moments to discuss ways to keep their bodies healthy
- Explain that some drugs can make you feel better and help your body work properly. Be clear that other drugs, like alcohol and tobacco, are not good at all for their bodies and can make children very sick
- Teach them how to say "no" if someone offers them something they think is dangerous or are unsure about

AGES 9-12

Set clear rules and expectations about substance use

- Make it clear that you disapprove of all alcohol, vaping, nicotine and drug use
- Ask what they know about substance use and what they see in their school. Actively listen to what they have to say
- Establish clear, realistic and attainable rules and consequences
- Focus comments on your child's individuality and strengths to help them build self-esteem
- Be aware of your behaviors and set a good example

AGES 13-18

Continue ongoing conversations and remain firm on your expectations and boundaries

- Maintain open lines of communication. Be prepared to answer their questions calmly, and control your emotions if you hear something you don't like
- Consider developing a written agreement that clearly outlines your family rules
- Agree on a procedure they can follow if they're in a situation where alcohol or other drugs are present so you can help them get out without their peers knowing
- Remind them that their brain is still developing through their mid-20s and substance use can cause damage
- Make sure they know to never drive impaired or get in the car with a driver who has been using substances

AGES 19-24

Remain supportive while they gain independence

- Have conversations about becoming an adult and having more responsibilities
- Remind them that peer pressure doesn't go away just because they're getting older
- Stay alert to possible mental health issues and remind them you are always there to help
- Address the prevalence and dangers of various substances on college campuses and emphasize the appropriate use of prescription drugs

Adapted from SAMHSA, DFK Canada, Partnership to End Addiction & American Academy of Pediatrics

At all ages and stages, celebrate when your child makes positive, healthy choices!

