**Talk to Your Kids about Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drugs**

**The Basics**

Talk to your child about the dangers of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. Knowing the facts will help your child make healthy choices.

**What do I say?**
When you talk about tobacco, alcohol, and drugs:

* Give your child clear rules.
* Find out what your child already knows.
* Be prepared to answer your child’s questions.
* Talk with your child about how to say “no”.

[Get more information on keeping kids healthy and drug free (http://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com/content/prevent.html)](http://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com/content/prevent.html). 

**When do I start talking with my child?**
Start early. By preschool, most children have seen adults smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol, either in real life or on TV. Make sure your child knows right from the start that you think it’s important to stay safe and avoid drugs.

Here are more reasons to start the conversation early:

* Many kids start using tobacco by age 11 and are addicted by age 14.
* Between ages 9 and 13, kids begin to think that using alcohol is okay.
* Some children are already abusing drugs at age 12 or 13.

***What if my child is older?***
It’s never too late to start the conversation about avoiding drugs. Even if your teen may have tried tobacco, alcohol, or drugs, you can still talk about making healthy choices and how to say “no” next time.

[Get more tips to help your teen stay away from drugs and alcohol (http://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com/prevent/for\_parents\_concerned\_about\_their\_teens\_ages\_13-17.html)](http://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com/prevent/for_parents_concerned_about_their_teens_ages_13-17.html). 

**Why do I need to talk to my child?**
Research shows that kids do listen to their parents. Children who learn about drug risks from their parents are less likely to start using drugs.

When kids choose not to use alcohol or drugs, they are also less likely to:

* Have serious trouble in school
* Get hurt in a car accident
* Be a victim of crime
* Have a problem with addiction as an adult

If you say nothing, your child may think it’s okay to use alcohol and other drugs.

**Take Action!**

Start to talk with your child about tobacco, alcohol, and drugs today.

**Talk with your child early and often.**
Start having conversations about your values and expectations while your child is young. Your child will get used to sharing information and opinions with you. This will make it easier for you to continue talking as your child gets older.

Here are some tips:

* Use everyday events to start a conversation. For example, if you see a group of kids smoking, talk about how tobacco hurts the body.
* Give your child your full attention. Turn off the TV, radio, cell phone, and computer, and really listen.
* Try not to “talk at” your child. Encourage your child to ask questions. If you don’t know the answer to a question, look it up together.

[Get more tips on talking with your child (http://parent.drugfree.org/YourChild/)](http://parent.drugfree.org/YourChild/). 

**Teach your child the facts.**
Your child needs to know how using tobacco, alcohol, and drugs can hurt the body and cause problems at home and in school. Kids who know the facts are more likely to make good choices.

* [Get the facts on tobacco (http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/youth/information\_sheet/index.htm)](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/youth/information_sheet/index.htm). If your child likes sports, focus on how smoking can affect athletic performance. Or that tobacco causes bad breath and yellow teeth.
* [Get the facts on alcohol (http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/MakeADiff\_HTML/makediff.htm#Talkingwith)](http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/MakeADiff_HTML/makediff.htm#Talkingwith). Remind your child that alcohol is a powerful drug that slows down the body and brain.
* [Get the facts on other drugs (http://teens.drugabuse.gov/facts/index.php)](http://teens.drugabuse.gov/facts/index.php). Find out how steroids, marijuana, and prescription drugs affect the body.

[Play this game about drug facts with your child (http://teens.drugabuse.gov/havefun/pick\_a\_card/index.php)](http://teens.drugabuse.gov/havefun/pick_a_card/index.php).

**Set clear rules for your child.**
Not wanting to upset their parents is the number one reason kids give for not using drugs. Your child will be less tempted to use tobacco, alcohol, and drugs if you explain your rules clearly.

Here are some things to keep in mind when you talk to your child:

* Explain that you set rules to keep your child safe.
* Tell your child you expect her not to use tobacco, alcohol, or drugs.
* Let your child know what will happen if he breaks the rules.
* Praise your child for good behavior. [Get ideas on how to give your child encouragement and praise (http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/confidence.html#cat145)](http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/confidence.html#cat145). 

Get advice on [how to set rules for your family (http://bblocks.samhsa.gov/family/rules/tips.aspx)](http://bblocks.samhsa.gov/family/rules/tips.aspx).

**Give your child tools to say “NO”.**
Kids say that they use alcohol and other drugs to “fit in and belong” with other kids. Talk to your child about how to say “no”. Your child can make a plan for when other kids offer tobacco, drugs, or alcohol.

* [Share this Web site on resisting peer pressure with your child (http://www.thecoolspot.gov/pressures.asp)](http://www.thecoolspot.gov/pressures.asp).
* [Get tips on how to help your teen say “no” (http://teenbrain.drugfree.org/tools/powerofdrugs/sayno.html)](http://teenbrain.drugfree.org/tools/powerofdrugs/sayno.html).

**Set a good example.**

* If you smoke, [try to quit](http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicId=24).
* If you drink, [don’t drink too much or too often](http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicId=16).
* If you use drugs, [find a treatment program near you (http://dasis3.samhsa.gov/)](http://dasis3.samhsa.gov/).
* Never drink or use drugs and drive.

**Get help if you need it.**
If you think your child may have a drug or alcohol problem, get help. Don’t wait.

[Get tips on what to do if you think your child is using drugs or alcohol (http://timetoact.drugfree.org/)](http://timetoact.drugfree.org/). 

***What about cost?***
Drug and alcohol assessments for teens are now covered under the new [Affordable Care Act (http://www.healthcare.gov/law/provisions/preventive/index.html)](http://www.healthcare.gov/law/provisions/preventive/index.html) (ACA). Depending on your insurance plan, your child may be able to get an assessment at no cost to you.

Check with your insurance provider to find out what’s included in your plan. Ask about the ACA. [For information about other services covered by the ACA, visit HealthCare.gov (http://www.healthcare.gov/law/about/provisions/services/lists.html)](http://www.healthcare.gov/law/about/provisions/services/lists.html).

Learn how to [talk to your kids about sex](http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicId=77). Find out about [getting your teen screened for depression](http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicId=85).

**Start Today: Small Steps**

* [Share the Too Smart to Start Web site with your pre-teen (http://www.toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov/tweens/default.aspx)](http://www.toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov/tweens/default.aspx).
* Set aside 15 minutes tonight to listen and talk with your child.
* [Know the 3 steps to preventing teen prescription drug abuse (http://notinmyhouse.drugfree.org/steps.aspx)](http://notinmyhouse.drugfree.org/steps.aspx). 