

# What to Say to Your Preteen About Drugs (9-12 year olds)

Preteens, on their quest to figure out their place in the world, tend to give their friends' opinions a great deal of power, while at the same time starting to question their parents' views and messages.

## Tips for Conversations with Your Preteen

- Make sure your child knows your rules — and that you'll enforce the consequences if rules are broken. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.
- Kids who don't know what to say when someone offers them drugs are more likely to give in to peer pressure. Let her know that she can always use you as an excuse and say: "No, my mom [or dad, aunt, etc.] will be very mad with me if I smoke a cigarette."
- Feelings of insecurity, doubt and pressure may creep in during puberty. Offset those feelings with a lot of positive comments about who he is as an individual — and not just when he brings home an A.
- Preteens aren't concerned with future problems that might result from experimentation with tobacco, alcohol or other drugs, but they are concerned about their appearance — sometimes to the point of obsession. Tell them about the smelly hair and ashtray breath caused by cigarettes.
- Get to know your child's friends — and their friends' parents. Check in by phone or a visit once in a while to make sure they are on the same page with prohibiting drug or alcohol use, particularly when their home is to be used for a party or sleepover.
- Help children separate reality from fantasy. Watch TV and movies with them and ask lots of questions to reinforce the distinction between the two. Remember to include advertising in your discussions, as those messages are especially powerful.