

What to Say to Your Teenager About Drugs (13-18 year olds)

This is a pivotal time for parents in helping kids make positive choices when faced with drugs and alcohol. Teens are a savvy bunch when it comes to this topic, and they need detailed and reality-driven messages from you.

Tips for Conversations with Your Teenager

- Make sure your teen knows your rules and the consequences for breaking those rules — and, most importantly, that you really will enforce those consequences if the 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 are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use drugs.
- Make it clear that you disapprove of all alcohol, tobacco and drug use. As teens are extremely concerned with their physical appearance, remind your teen about the negative effects alcohol, tobacco and other drugs have on physical appearance.
- Let your teen in on all the things you find wonderful about him. He needs to hear a lot of positive comments about his life and who he is as an individual — and not just when he makes the basketball team or does well on a test. Positive reinforcement can go a long way in preventing drug use among teens.
- Show interest in and discuss your child's daily ups and downs. You'll earn your child's trust, learn how to talk to each other, and won't take your child by surprise when you voice a strong point of view about drugs.
- Don't just leave your child's anti-drug education up to her school. Ask your teen what she's learned about drugs in school and then build on that with additional topics, such as how and why chemical dependence occurs; the unpredictable nature of dependency and how it varies from person to person; the impact of drug use on maintaining a healthy lifestyle; or positive approaches to stress reduction.
- Encourage your teen to volunteer somewhere that he can see the impact of drugs on your community. Teenagers tend to be idealistic and enjoy hearing about ways they can help make an impact. Help your teen research volunteer opportunities at local homeless shelters, hospitals or victim services centers.