



KEEPING KIDS SAFE

A GUIDE TO DRUG AND
ALCOHOL PREVENTION

Talk to Your Kids About Drugs

Children whose parents speak with them about the dangers of drugs are 42 percent less likely to try drugs than children whose parents don't talk to them, the National Family Partnership, sponsors of Red Ribbon Week said.

But, according to the organization, only about a quarter of teens say their parents have talked with them. Keep reading for tips to help get the conversation started.

GET STARTED

If your child's school participates in Red Ribbon Week or other drug prevention programs, use those as a starting point for talking to them about drugs. Make sure to highlight the consequences of drug and alcohol use, both in your house in with the legal system.

TALK TO YOUR CHILD'S FRIENDS

It might be awkward, but also get your child's friends involved in the conversation. Know who they're hanging out with and when, where those children and their families live, and connect with them on social media.

TALK TO OTHER PARENTS

And, while we're doing all this talking, get to know the parents of your children's friends. Work with them to set boundaries and discuss appropriate behaviors. Also talk to other parents in your neighborhood and, if you can,

consider starting a neighborhood watch to keep an eye out for signs of drug use or other activity.

STAY CALM

Remember during these conversations to keep a cool head. Limit distractions before you get started and be com-

pletely focused on talking to your children, parents or others. And, as always, remember to listen to what others are telling you, even if it's difficult to hear.

SHOW AND TELL

If you drink in the home or while you're out with friends,

demonstrate good choices. Use a designated driver and don't drink to excess. Also be aware of how you use prescription drugs in the home, even over-the-counter ones. Be aware of you're using them inappropriately. Avoid any TV programs or other media that glorifies drugs and alcohol.



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Learn To Say No

In the moment, when your child is offered drugs or alcohol, it can be hard to say no. It can help if you role play and practice with them. Here are some ways to help them make good choices by saying no in the face of peer pressure.

LOTS OF WAYS TO SAY NO

The classic, of course, is the forceful “No!” that can get you a long way. Other statements can include:

- “Nah, my family would be really mad.”

- “I’m not into that.”

Practice pushing your children and prompting responses. Always stress that the lines of communication are open with you and that, if they’re ever uncomfortable in a situation, they need to leave.

REVERSE THE PRESSURE

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services points out that not all peer pressure is bad. Teach your children to support their friends when they see them being pressured to use drugs or alcohol. The key word in these responses is the word we:

- We’re not into that.
- We don’t do that.
- We’re leaving to go see a movie.

Sometimes, a friend’s support can save a life.

SPOKEN VS. UNSPOKEN PEER PRESSURE

There’s another, sneakier kind of peer pressure. The kind that doesn’t act directly.

Prepare your children for the kind of peer pressure that comes when a party full of people are drinking. No one may directly ask them to drink, but the impression they may get is that they’re not cool if they don’t. Stress making the right decision in either situation.

REMIND AND REINFORCE

This isn’t a one-time conversation. It’s one that happens early and often. Make sure to talk to your children regularly about the social situations they find themselves in, dealing with peer pressure and making good decisions.

Drug Use Fast Facts

There's a wealth of information about drug use in the U.S. Here are some quick facts you can use to help talk to your kids about drug use.

- In 2013, 24.6 million Americans over the age of 12 had used an illicit drug in the last month, an increase from the 2002 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Survey on Drug Use and Health. The increase is mostly in the use of marijuana, the most commonly used illicit drug.

- The survey showed cocaine use as gone down in recent years, but methamphetamine use was up.

- People tend to start using drugs when they are teenagers, most begin with marijuana and drug use is highest among people in their late teens and twenties. In 2013, 22 percent of people 18 to 20 reported using an illicit drug in the past month.

- Fewer Americans are smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol.

- About 4,000 people under age 21 die each year from injuries caused by underage drinking, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. More than 35 percent of those injuries are in car crashes.



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- Around 40 percent of people who start drinking under the age of 15 become alcoholics, according to the Office of the Surgeon General.

- More people die from pre-

scription opioid overdoses than from heroin and cocaine combined, according to the CDC.

- Teens are more likely to use e-cigarettes than tradi-

tional cigarettes, says the National Institute of Drug Abuse. Less than 15 percent of high school seniors say e-cigarettes are harmful.

- Long-term drug use can

cause changes in the way your brain works, affecting learning, judgment, stress, memory, decision-making and behavior, the National Institute on Drug Abuse says.

Addiction and the Brain

It's no secret that our brain likes it when we do enjoyable things, like eating ice cream, running or being around the ones we love. Unfortunately, our brains have a hard time differentiating between ice cream and drugs or alcohol.

But after you take drugs or drink alcohol for a while, it takes more and more to achieve the same result, says the National Institute for Drug Abuse. Keep reading to learn more about addiction and the brain.

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

People with mental health problems like depression or anxiety are more likely to become addicted to drugs, the institute says. It's because drugs and mental health problems often affect the same parts of the brain. Also, people who live with mental health problems may try to self-medicate by using drugs.

However, drug problems can often make mental health problems worse.

GENETIC CONNECTION

Some genes may make you more likely to use drugs, the



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institute says, but watching parents or older family members use drugs or drink alcohol may affect children even more. Living with addiction may also affect children's emotional growth, which can also raise

the chances of having a drug problem. It doesn't have to happen, though. Children raised with addiction problems can overcome their genes and environment and by not using drugs at all.

TREATING ADDICTION

Realizing how drugs affect your brain can help you overcome addiction. Learn your triggers, the institute advises. Triggers can be things like: certain people and places, feel-

ings, stress or memories. Seek professional help to stay clean. Talking to doctors and therapy or support groups also might help. Remember that kicking an addiction takes time, but it's worth it in the end.



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The Signs of Addiction

The classic sign of a drug or alcohol problem is that someone keeps using drugs or drinking despite repeated negative consequences. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration points out some of the hallmarks of a problem with using drugs or alcohol.

DENIAL

Denying that negative consequences are part of an addiction is perhaps the most recognizable symptoms of a substance abuse disorder. Legal troubles, financial consequences and relationship problems are laid at the feet of those around users.

CRAVING

Another classic symptom of addiction is that someone feels as though they need drugs or alcohol to get on with everyday life. He may feel anxious if he can't drink or find alcohol. She may get depressed if she can't find pills. To people battling addic-

tion, drugs or alcohol will often take precedence in their lives.

TOLERANCE

Addicts will find that, over time, they will need more and more drugs or alcohol to achieve the same effect. This can lead to serious health consequences as doses reach lethal levels or addicts try stronger and stronger drugs to get high.

WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

If someone deep in the throes of addiction can get hold of their drugs or alcohol, they may experience withdrawal symptoms like nausea, shak-

ing and extreme anxiety. Withdrawal symptoms often differ depending on the drug and can be a major barrier to an addict getting clean.

RELAPSING

It may take an addict several tries to get themselves off of drugs or alcohol. Each time someone gets clean but then uses again is called a relapse.

Prevent relapses by removing, as much as possible, triggers from the recovering addict's life. Continue using therapy, whether it's medication or talk therapy or support groups.



Prescription Drug Abuse

Prescription drugs are only safe for the people for whom they were prescribed. But one in seven teens report they have taken a prescription drug that wasn't meant for them, according to the Nemours Foundation.

Prescription drugs may be easier to get than street drugs like cocaine or marijuana, and some people may even think they're safe because they came from a doctor.

COMMONLY ABUSED PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

There are three classes of commonly abused prescription drugs.

- Opioids, such as oxycodone or hydrocodone, are commonly used for pain relief, treatment of diarrhea or

coughs. These drugs attach to receptors in the central nervous system and keep the brain from receiving pain messages.

- Central nervous system depressants like Valium and Xanax usually treat anxiety, panic attacks and sleep problems. They slow down brain activity and create a drowsy or calming effect.

- Stimulants like Ritalin and Adderall are used to treat narcolepsy and ADHD. The opposite of depressants,

these drugs increase brain activity, resulting in alertness and more energy.

DANGERS OF ABUSE

Addiction of any of these prescription drugs can cause health issues or even be fatal. Opioid abuse can lead to impaired cognitive function, decreased respiration or even coma or death. Depressant abuse can cause seizures and impair respiration. Stimulant abuse can tax the heart and cause people to become aggressive or paranoid.

Furthermore, if prescription drugs are out there being abused, somewhere a patient is missing out on the treatment they need to live a normal life. Doctors and pharmacists can also get in trouble when their patients become addicted to prescription drugs.

FIGHTING PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

There are ways you can fight prescription drug abuse. Lock up your prescriptions and dispose of all unused medication properly by using take-back programs in your community. If there's no such program in your area, follow these tips from the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

- Remove the drugs from their original containers and mix them with particularly yucky refuse like cat litter. Put the mixture into a disposable container with a lid.

- Remove any personal information and the prescription number from the drug container and put it in the container with the drugs. Then, put it all in the household trash.

Spotting Drug Paraphernalia

In addition to keeping an eye out for the physical and emotional signs of drug use, there are also some other things to look out for. Here's a list from the Drug Enforcement Agency.

- Plastic baggies or small paper bags, small glass vials, unknown pill bottles or unfamiliar makeup bags.
- Rolling papers or pipes for marijuana, bongs, roach clips or e-cigarettes to use with marijuana concentrates.
- Needles, tin foil, glass pipes, cut up drinking straws and spoons are all indicative of heroin use.
- If you suspect cocaine use, look for pipes, mirrors and small spoons, straws or tubes, razor blades and lighters.
- MDMA, Ecstasy or molly users may have glow sticks, surgical or dust masks, carry pacifiers and lollipops to prevent teeth grinding and jaw clenching, and bags of candy to hide the pills.
- Inhalant use usually comes with rags for sniffing and tubes of glue, balloons, nozzles, and bottles or aerosol cans with hardened glue, sprays, paint or other chemical odors.

Other paraphernalia to watch out for includes mouthwash, mints and sprays to hide odors; eye drops for bloodshot



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eyes; and frequent use of sunglasses. Children can find most of this stuff in your garage or as close as the local corner store.

Check your state and local laws and make sure to talk to children about the penalties for drug use and possession of

paraphernalia.

IF YOU SUSPECT DRUG USE

Pick the right time to talk to your child about any suspected drug use. Voice your suspicions without making accusations,

the DEA suggests, and be specific about things that make you concerned. Be prepared for strong reactions, but reinforce what you think about drug use and how much you love your child.

Also be prepared to call in

the experts. Talk to the school counselor or nurse, or put your family doctor in the loop to get more help. Always get your child evaluated for a substance abuse disorder so they can get the right kind of help they need.