

How to talk to your KIDS ABOUT DRUGS

Young people want advice from their parents.
Early and ongoing communication is the key.

1 Establish early open communication

Really listen and take an interest in what your kids do generally from when they are very young. Try not to criticise or make fun of them when they ask questions about the world. Show them that you are open to discussing anything. When kids don't feel comfortable talking to parents, they'll look for answers somewhere else, even if the sources are unreliable.

2 Ask questions in the right way

When you want to have input and guide them, try to ask questions that are designed to help your kids think through the answer themselves ('Socratic questions'). This helps them develop good problem solving and decision making skills and also reduces the risk of perceived criticism, which can shut down conversations.

3 Communicate values and boundaries

Kids need and like ground rules. They may try to push boundaries at times, but consistent communication of values helps them understand what is OK and what is not OK in your family. At the same time actively reinforce when they act consistently with your positive values, and take a keen interest in as much as you can about their world to show that you care about their choices.

4 Be specific

When you do talk about alcohol, tobacco, medicines and illicit drugs, be specific about the effects, what happens if you take too much (overdose) and possible long term damage. You might need to do a little research so you are familiar yourself, but you can also search for the answers together, which further opens the communication channels.

5 Preschool to Year 2

When giving medicines to younger children, you can start to talk about what they are used for, what the side effects are, why a doctor prescribes them and why it is important to follow the instructions. If you see someone smoking talk to them about health effects and addiction.

6 Year 2 to Year 6

Kids might start asking questions about alcohol and other drugs at this age, but you can also use drug use in movies or on TV to start a discussion. Ask what they know about drugs, what they think about drug use. Use this opportunity to give them information or look it up together, and also reinforce your values and boundaries about drugs

7 High school

At this age, your kids might know others who have tried alcohol or other drugs, especially around Year 9-12. Use these opportunities to reinforce your values.

You can start talking about legal aspects, including illicit drugs, but importantly talk about the dangers of driving under the influence of substances of any sort.

Discuss what they would do if offered alcohol or other drugs. Let them know that you will always collect them anytime no matter what has happened and if they are worried they should call you.

Talk to them about what to do if someone they know gets into trouble with drugs, including when to call an ambulance.

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