

PARENT'S GUIDE

How to Teach Kids to turn down DRUGS, ALCOHOL & CIGARETTES



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**MESA COUNTY
UNDERAGE
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Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division

There's no way you can shield your kids from finding out that illegal drugs, alcohol, and tobacco exist — but you can help your child reject offers to try them.

Before you work with your child on this issue, there's one thing you need to know: kids don't usually get drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes from strangers. They get these from their friends and often times at home, or from family members. That's the toughest issue of all: teaching your kids that it's okay to say no to their friends or even family members — the people they look to for validation, recognition, and fun. Strongly encourage your child to avoid friendships with kids who use drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes and to always let you know if someone in the family has offered any of these to them.

More importantly than knowing where children obtain drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes is instilling in them values that promote healthy choices throughout their life, and this begins early... long before your child even thinks about drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes. Here are some scenarios to help you guide those conversations:

Scripts courtesy of TimeToTalk.org. Script coaching was provided by parenting experts Jen Singer, author of You're a Good Mom (and Your Kids Aren't So Bad Either), Marybeth Hicks, author of Bringing Up Geeks: How to Protect Your Kid's Childhood in a Grow-Up-Too-Fast World, and Amelia Arria, Ph.D., senior research scientist, Treatment Research Institute.



PRESCHOOL

Giving your child a daily vitamin.

What to Say: Vitamins help your body grow. You need to take them every day so that you'll grow up big and strong like Mommy and Daddy — but you should only take what I give you. Too many vitamins can hurt you and make you sick.

Your kids are curious about medicine bottles

around the house.

What to Say: You should only take medicines that have your name on them or that your doctor has chosen just for you. If you take medicine that belongs to somebody else, it could be dangerous and make you sick.

Your child sees an adult smoking and, since you've talked about the dangers of smoking, is confused. (Parenting

expert Jen Singer says the same script applies to grade-schoolers.)

What to Say: Grown-ups can make their own decisions and sometimes those decisions aren't the best for their bodies. Sometimes, when someone starts smoking, his or her body feels like it has to have cigarettes — even though it's not healthy. And that makes it harder for him or her to quit.

GRADE SCHOOL

Your child tells you he was offered prescription drugs by a classmate — but said no.

What to Say: After praising your child for making a good choice and for telling you about it, let him know that in the future, he can always blame you to get out of a bad situation. Say, "If you're ever offered drugs at school, tell that person, 'My mother would kill me if I took that and then she wouldn't let me play baseball.'"

Your child has expressed curiosity about the pills she sees you take every day — and the other bottles in the medicine cabinet.

What to Say: Just because it's in a family's medicine cabinet doesn't mean that it is safe for you to take. Even if your friends say it's okay, say, "No, my parents won't let me take something that doesn't have my name on the bottle."

One in five teens in America has tried huffing — inhaling the fumes from everyday items like nail polish remover, hair spray, and cooking spray. It's probably been a while since you've talked to your child about the dangers of the products under the kitchen sink — but it's important to reiterate the warning.

What to Say: I know it's been a while since I talked to you about the dangers of cleaning

products and that they should only be used for cleaning. But I've heard that some kids are using them to get high. I just want to let you know that even if your friends say, "Hey, we can buy this stuff at the super-

market so it's totally okay to sniff it," it's not. Inhaling fumes from cleaners or products like cooking spray and nail polish remover is as dangerous as doing all the drugs we've talked about, like marijuana.

Now, let's talk about ways you can get out of the situation if that happens. What do you think you should say? Remember, you can always blame me and say, "My mom would kill me if I tried that!"

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Your child is just starting middle school and you know that eventually, he will be offered drugs and alcohol.

What to Say: There are a lot of changes ahead of you in middle school. I know we talked about drinking and drugs when you were younger, but now is when they're probably going to be an issue. I'm guessing you'll at least hear about kids who are experimenting, if not find yourself some place where kids are doing stuff that is risky. I just want you to remember that I'm here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the stuff you hear or see. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?

You find out that kids are selling prescription drugs at your child's school.

Your child hasn't mentioned it and you want to get the conversation about it started.

What to Say: Hey, you probably know that parents talk to each other and find out about what's going on at school... I heard there are kids selling pills—prescriptions that either they are taking or someone in their family takes. Have you heard about kids doing this?

Your child's favorite celebrity—the one he or she really looks up to—has been named in a drug scandal.

What to Say: I think it must be really difficult

to live a celebrity life. Being in the public eye puts a ton of pressure on people, and many turn to drugs because they think drugs will relieve that stress. But a lot of famous people manage to stay clean—like [name others who don't do drugs]—and hopefully this incident is going to help [name of celebrity] straighten out their life. Of course, people make mistakes—the real measure of a person is how accountable they are when they mess up. You know, when a person uses drugs and alcohol, it changes how their brain works and makes them do things they end up regretting. Most people who use drugs and alcohol need a lot of help to get better. I hope [name] has a good doctor and friends and family members to help them through this.

HIGH SCHOOL

Your teen is starting high school — and you want to remind him that he doesn't have to give in to peer pressure to drink or use drugs.

What to Say: You must be so excited about starting high school... it's going to be a ton of fun, and we want you to have a great time. But we also know there's going to be some pressure to start drinking, smoking pot, or taking other drugs. A lot of people feel like this is just what high school kids do. But not all high school kids drink! Many don't, which means it won't make you weird to choose not to drink, either. You can still

have a lot of fun if you don't drink.

You'll have a lot of decisions to make about what you want to do in high school and you might even make some mistakes. Just know that you can talk to us about anything—even if you DO make a mistake. We won't freak out. We want you to count on us to help you make smart decisions and stay safe, okay?

Every time you ask your teen how his day was, you get a mumbled, "Whatever, it was okay," in return.

What to Say: Skip asking general questions like "How's school?" every day. Instead, ask more specific questions on topics that interest both you and your teen ("Tell me about the pep rally yesterday." "Are there a lot of cliques in your school?" "Fill me in on your Chemistry lab test.") You can also use humor and even some gentle sarcasm to get the conversation flowing. Try, "I know, I'm nosy and un-cool, but I care about what's going on with you, so give me break, okay?" to make your child laugh and start opening up a bit.



Your child comes home smelling of alcohol or cigarette smoke for the first time.

How to Respond: “The response should be measured, quiet and serious—not yelling, shouting or overly emotional,” says parenting expert Marybeth Hicks. “Your child should realize that this isn’t just a frustrating moment like when he doesn’t do a chore you asked for; it’s very big, very important, and very serious.”

What to Say: Calmly say, “I’m really upset that

you’re smoking/drinking. As your Mom/Dad/Guardian, I need to get a handle on how often this has been happening and what your experiences have been so far. I get that you’re worried about being in trouble, but the worst part of that moment is over—I know that you’re experimenting. The best thing you can do now is really be straight with me, so for starters, tell me about what happened tonight...”

Your teen has started to hang out with kids you don’t know — and dropped his

old friends.

What to Say: I’m curious about [old friends’ names] what have they been up to lately? I’ve noticed you are hanging with a different crowd than you have in the past. What’s changed? So, you are branching out and meeting some new people... tell me about your new friends. Where did you meet them? What do they like to do? What do you like about them? Why don’t you bring them over after school on (pick a day) this week, I can’t wait to meet them.

YOUNG ADULTS 18-25

Your adult child is moving to her own apartment or into a college dorm.

What to Say: I know you’re off to start your own life but please know that I’m always here for

you. I respect that you’re old enough to make your own choices, but if you ever want another perspective on things, give a shout. I’ll try my hardest to help you out without judging you for your decisions. Sound good?

Amelia Arria, senior research scientist at the Treatment Research Institute, also suggests: There are certain things that you can count on in life and one of the things you’re going to be able to count on is me. As your parent, I am always here for you. Remember,

I am your support. I’m the one who can guide you.

After watching a movie portraying drug use together, you want to gauge your adult child’s opinion on drugs.

What to Say: I know you’re going to think that I’m over-protective or meddling, and I’m sorry. But that movie really made me think: is there a lot of drug use at your college/in your new town? Do the new friends that you’ve made dabble in drugs at all? How do you feel about it?



Role Playing Scenarios

A great way to help kids prepare for alcohol and drug-related situations is by 'role playing' scenarios with them. It's important to practice these scenarios with your kids before these situations really happen.

Remember, teens rarely verbally pressure or chastise each other into drinking or doing drugs. Rather, the offer is usually casual. "Peer pressure" is more internal than you probably think. For example, your child sees other teens that she wants to be friends with enjoying a drink or a drug and she feels like she wants to be part of it too. Or, she may be afraid that the other teens will think she is less cool if she doesn't join them. Try to include this dynamic when you act out scenarios with your teens. Use the following two scenarios as a starting point, but create new ones based on your child's life and have some fun with these; humor is a great tool in memory recall.

Scenario #1

Your son or daughter goes to a party at his or her friend's house and someone has brought a bottle of vodka or some beer. Some of the older high school teens are drinking and ask, "You want some?" Take the role of the older teens or

of your teen's friends who casually offered the beer or vodka to your son or daughter.

Help your teen to develop firm but friendly responses. Reassure them that their friends will respect their decision not to get involved. Remind them that people are pretty focused on themselves, which leaves much less brain space for them to be concerned with what others do.

Scenario #2

Your daughter or son is at their friend's house with a few close pals and one of them pulls out a joint. Take the role of one of their friends offering it to the group.

Again, help them develop firm but friendly responses and reassure her that good friends will respect her decision not to try it. Your kids will need to be prepared for protests from their peers. Suggest that they meet them with a

"broken record" technique—just keep repeating the reason they don't want to drink, smoke, or do drugs. Then they can try to change the subject or, if all else fails, they should say they have to go home or ask their friend to leave the house.

Possible Answers:

"No, thanks."

"No. I gotta go in a bit."

"Nah, I'm ok. Thanks."

"No, I'm not into that."

"No, thanks. I'm on the ----- team and I don't want to risk it."

"Nah, I'm training for -----."

"A friend of mine got involved in that stuff it was really horrible for him."

"I'm an athlete, coach would take me out of the game."

"I can't—if my dad or mom ever found out, they'd be really upset."

"No, that's not for me."

"No, I'm trying to stay healthy for -----."

"Nah. I get tested at work/school and I don't want to risk it."

"No, thanks. I don't like how it makes people not act like themselves."



That's great!

That's fantastic!

Well done!

Let me give you a compliment.

What a great idea.

Way to go!

What an improvement!

I love you.

Way to go!

Can I get you anything?

How do you feel?

That's awesome!

Just do your best.

You've made real progress.

You make me smile.

I'm glad you're my child.

You are a natural...

Tell me about it.

Do you need help?

If you're worried about something, let's discuss it.

We make a great team.

You can talk to me anytime.

That was a good try.

I'm glad you called.

You're exactly right.

I couldn't have done that without your help.

I'm sorry you're hurting.

You look wonderful.

I had a wonderful time.

You're a good friend.

Do you want to talk about it?

What can I do to help?

I knew you could do it

You did a good job.

You're a great sport.

You are so thoughtful.

I appreciate your kindness.

Are you all right?

I enjoy spending time with you.

You are really creative.

I'm proud of you.

We'll work it out together.

I care about you.

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