

Healthy Living

Talk to Your Kids About Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drugs

<https://health.gov/myhealthfinder/healthy-living/mental-health-and-relationships/talk-your-kids-about-tobacco-alcohol-and-drugs>



The Basics

Overview

Talk to your child about the dangers of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. Knowing the facts will help your child make healthy choices.

What do I need to say?

When you talk to your child about tobacco, alcohol, and drugs:

- Find out what they already know
- Teach them the facts
- Give them clear rules
- Be prepared to answer your child's questions
- Talk with them about how to say "no"

When to Start

When should I start talking with my child?

Start early. By preschool, most children have seen adults smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol, either in real life, on TV, or online.

Make sure your child knows right from the start that you think it's important to stay safe and avoid drugs.

Here are more reasons to start the conversation early:

- Almost 9 out of 10 smokers start smoking before they turn 18
- By the time they're in 8th grade, most children say alcohol is easy to get
- At age 12, some kids are already using drugs like marijuana or prescription pain relievers

What if my child is older?

It's never too late to start the conversation about avoiding drugs. Even if your teen may have tried tobacco, alcohol, or drugs, you can still talk about making healthy choices and how to say "no" next time.

Get more tips to [help your teen stay away from drugs](#) .

Medicine Misuse

What do I need to know about prescriptions and other medicines?

When you talk to your child about the dangers of drugs, don't forget about drugs that may already be in your home, like prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs.

Prescription or OTC drug misuse is when a person uses a drug to get high. People might misuse drugs by:

- Taking too much of a prescription or OTC drug
- Taking a prescription drug prescribed to someone else

When not taken safely, prescription and OTC medicines can be just as addictive and dangerous as other drugs.

Commonly misused prescription or OTC drugs include:

- Opioid pain killers, like Vicodin, OxyContin, or codeine
- Medicines used for anxiety or sleep problems, like Valium or Xanax
- Medicines that treat ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), like Adderall or Ritalin

Make sure to talk to your child about the dangers of prescription drug misuse. [Share this website about prescription and OTC drug misuse](#) with them.

Set a good example:

- Never take someone else's prescription medicine or give yours to anyone else
- Keep track of the medicines in your home, and store them in a locked cabinet
- Get rid of unused medicines safely

Why It Matters

Why do I need to talk to my child?

Research shows that kids do listen to their parents. Children who learn about drug risks from their parents are less likely to start using drugs.

When kids choose not to use alcohol or drugs, they're also less likely to:

- Have serious trouble in school
- Get hurt in a car accident
- Be a victim of crime
- Have a problem with addiction as an adult

If you don't talk about it, your child may think it's okay to use alcohol and other drugs.

[Take Action](#)

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[Get Your Teen Screened for Depression](#)



[Make the Most of Your Teen's Visit to the Doctor \(Ages 15 to 17 Years\)](#)

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