

# Start A Conversation...

Most parents do not feel ready to discuss the dangers of drugs and alcohol with their elementary school children. They want to believe that at this young and easily influenced age, their child's teachers, supervisors, and friends are all working together to protect them from encountering substances that cause long-lasting harm. No matter how favorable your child's school environment is, by the time he or she enters the elementary grades, it is time to begin preparing them for their first inevitable exposure to drugs and alcohol.

## Open a Line of Communication

Teach your children that they can approach you about any subject at all with the confidence that they will receive a kind, gentle, trustworthy response. Building your elementary school child's trust will ensure that even if he or she has a very uncomfortable experience at school, or even gives in to the temptation to try drugs when they are offered, they will come to you for help. Avoid doing or saying anything to imply that if your child is in trouble, he will only experience more consequences by admitting it to you. In addition, a history of "talking about everything" with parents will encourage your child to ask you questions when he sees alcohol in a friend's home or discovers prescription pills exchanging hands at school.

## Be Attentive

Are you inclined to resent interruptions by your child when you are engaged in other activities? Showing your elementary school child that his life is important to you often means putting other responsibilities to the side. Parents send the wrong message by putting off conversations, then later forgetting about them. Be very careful—you may not realize that your child is at a crossroads and needs advice about handling a situation involving alcohol or drugs.

...To Keep Them Safe For A Lifetime.

## RESOURCES

Parents - The Antidrug:

800-662-HELP  
[www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com)

The Partnership at Drugfree.org:

855-378-4373  
[www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)  
[www.timetotalk.org](http://www.timetotalk.org)

National Institute on Drug Abuse - Parenting Resources:

[www.drugabuse.gov/parents-teachers](http://www.drugabuse.gov/parents-teachers)

>INFOCUS

TALKING WITH  
YOUR CHILD  
*about drugs and alcohol*

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P.O. Box 6986 Metairie, LA 70009-6986 • 877-329-0578  
[www.ESPublish.com](http://www.ESPublish.com) • product #PB-DA177

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## Establish Foundations

You can place your child in a dangerous position by concealing all information about drugs and alcohol from him during this important learning period. You may think you are sheltering him from their influences, but without a basic understanding of what alcohol and, especially, common drugs even look like, he will be unprepared to even recognize them as sources of danger. Knowing that these substances make it hard for the brain and body to work correctly is essential for your child, and you may want to go further by warning him that their use can seem deceptively enjoyable at first. Actively look for opportunities to discuss these topics when they appear on billboards, TV commercials, news stories, or movies. By doing so, you can make sure that your child's initial reaction to an offer of drugs or alcohol is negative, rather than innocently curious.

Establish unchangeable policies for your family when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Make sure that your child knows the difference between the prescription pills you use and the ones

they might see kids using at school. If there is alcohol in your home, tell your children exactly what the boundaries are about its use (legal drinking age, moderation, etc.).

## Answer Questions

When your kids have questions, they will look for the answers from someone. Even if they are questions that you feel awkward answering, it is important that you answer them rather than a peer or an ill-intentioned adult. Some answers require huge amounts of humility and trust on the part of parents: "Have you ever used illegal drugs?" "Why do people like alcohol if it's so bad?" "Is my friend bad because he took pills?" Don't put these questions off, and don't underestimate your child's intelligence by making up an implausible reply. Sooner or later, he will realize you didn't tell the truth, and your trustworthiness will be severely damaged. Build your own credibility by admitting uncomfortable truths, and use the opportunity to have a deeply personal conversation about your child's own choices.

## Role Playing Activities

Experts have discovered that role playing is an excellent way to give children a realistic impression of encounters with drugs and alcohol, all within the safety of the home. Play the role of a classmate or adult offering drugs or alcohol, and try to include statements, questions, and pressures that they are likely to hear in real life. Help your child develop specific responses, including explanations. Some examples are:

- "It's against the law."
- "My parents would kill me!/I would be grounded for life./My parents would never let me hang out with friends again."
- "I don't want to hurt my ability to play sports/do well in school/go to college."

During these role playing activities, help your child understand that it's not a good idea to respond with personal attacks or name-calling. A simple negative response is enough to get your child out of a situation without creating any more problems.

## Plan To Address Problems

If you can prepare yourself for the unfortunate possibility of addressing the situation of alcohol or drug use by your elementary school child, you will be able to avoid reacting with shock, uncontrolled anger, or horror. A child who is in trouble and scared after an experience with drugs or alcohol will be terrified even further by these responses. An initial expression of compassion will assure your child that he can tell you anything, and that you will be there to help him rather than make his problems worse. Be aware that your response during this critical moment could set the tone for your interactions in this area throughout the upcoming high school years.

It is equally important to make the most of successes. If your elementary school child tells you he refused an offer of beer at a friend's house, recognize the triumph against peer pressure that he has won. Reinforcing a success will make it easier to win the next time.



## Know Your Child's School

The better you know your child's school environment, his teachers and friends, and any drug and alcohol problems that exist there, the better you can help him. Find out about drug prevention programs the school sponsors and get involved. Besides giving you a great foundation for discussions at home, your involvement at school will show your child that you are deeply interested in what he does while he is outside the home.

## Keep The Conversation Going

Establish with your child that talking about drugs and alcohol is an ongoing conversation. Educating them is a step in protecting them. At this age, a child may take a drug or drink alcohol innocently or accidentally. It is important for them to know what your expectations are and equip them with some role-playing strategies. As your child gets older, reassess which parenting style will work best. But no matter which approach you chose, an open and informed conversation between you and your child will best arm them to deflect the pressures to use drugs or alcohol.

**Be Honest. Be Attentive**  
**Be Open. Be There.**