

It's Never Too Late to Talk.

There are a few topics that nearly all parents of high school children dread talking about. Alcohol and drugs top that list in most families, and parents often tend to avoid the subjects in order to keep a peaceful atmosphere at home. After all, they get plenty of prevention education at school, right? In fact, most students have already been exposed to alcohol and drug use at school by the time they enter high school, and they need the support, help, and advice of their parents in order to avoid making life-changing mistakes. There are many things that you, as a parent, can do to encourage meaningful conversations with your high school child about saying no to drugs and alcohol.

Be Approachable

Most high school students seem to view their parents as distant, disconnected from their lives, and unable to understand them. You can prove them wrong by making it clear to your child that their life is your top priority. Take every opportunity to focus on what your child says to you, and never brush off a conversation that they initiate. You never know when a conversation could be the turning point in a high schooler's mind about whether or not to try drugs. Make your interest clear by asking questions, remembering past conversations, and setting aside important tasks to spend time together instead.

Be Proactive

Don't wait for a crisis to occur before bringing up the subject of drugs and alcohol with your child. Even if you have never discussed them in the past, it is never too late to have a conversation devoted to the dangers of alcohol and drugs with your teen. If you open the door to discussion before problems arise, it will be much easier for your high schooler to approach you later if a serious situation arises. If you suspect they are already experimenting with substance abuse, address it! Don't stand aside and hope that your child will come to a good decision on his own. For many parents, this means going against their natural tendency to avoid confrontation. It is worth the discomfort, however, to prepare your child for the peer pressure challenges that he will face. Stand on the authority of the law as well—make sure your teen knows that there are stiff legal penalties for drinking underage and for abusing both illegal and legal drugs.

RESOURCES

Parents - The Antidrug:

800-662-HELP

www.theantidrug.com

The Partnership at Drugfree.org:

855-378-4373

www.drugfree.org

www.timetotalk.org

National Institute on Drug Abuse - Parenting Resources:

www.drugabuse.gov/parents-teachers

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TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

about drugs and alcohol



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Be Prepared

Educate yourself about the substances that your high school child is likely to encounter. If you can show your child that you are a reliable source of information and not simply a disciplinarian, your words will carry weight. Spend time researching the most popular new drugs available, read recent news articles about drug activity, and be ready to share the information you learn with your high schooler. Find out what trends are popular among students in your area, such as huffing fumes or using over-the-counter drugs. If friends at school appear to be better educated than you about what drugs are available and what their effects are, they will seem more trustworthy. Once you have shown that you know what you are talking about, you will be ready to establish authoritative rules and guidelines.

Anticipate the hard questions. Decide ahead of time how to answer the question, “Did you do drugs when you were younger?” If you drink alcohol yourself on occasion, be ready to explain why it is okay for you but not for them. Prepare an explanation for why prescription drugs are dangerous even though they are legal.

Be Smart

Knowing what to say is part of your responsibility, but knowing how to say it is probably more important. Striking the balance between authority and friendship is difficult in any parent-

child conversation, but when alcohol or drugs is the topic, it is even harder. Think about your words before you say them, and never lose your temper. Going off on a tirade is a sure way to show your child that you are impossible to talk to.

Don’t underestimate your child’s ability to see through your words. If you used drugs in the past, be honest about it. If you have an alcohol problem, don’t try to cover it up. Admitting mistakes and talking about the consequences you suffered makes you more trustworthy, not less—your child already knows you are not perfect, so there’s no need to pretend you are! Talking with your high schooler as an equal when it comes to your own failures will show him that it is okay to admit his mistakes.

Be Patient

How have you responded in the past when your child has approached you after making a mistake? If your normal reaction is to lose your temper and impose heavy penalties, your high

schooler is unlikely to come to you for help after giving in to the temptation of getting high or drunk. It is critical to lay the groundwork of a patient, understanding attitude in response to failure, and to make sure that your child knows he can tell you anything without fearing an explosion of anger. If your high schooler is at a party and has no way to get home other than riding in a car driven by a drunk friend, you want him to feel like he can call you for a ride home instead. If he is terrified after experiencing a hallucinogenic high for the first time, make sure that you are the one he comes to for help first.

Be Real

Tell the truth. Don’t imply that using marijuana once will kill you, or that alcohol carries no enjoyable qualities whatsoever. Scare tactics don’t work with highschoolers when they can tell they are exaggerated, and they only hurt your credibility. A balanced position and calm, accurate conversations about substances will show that you trust your teen enough to tell them the truth.



Be Firm

Let your teen know your expectations. Explain to them that unlike other “misbehaviors” the consequences of abusing drugs or alcohol can lead to addiction, physical and/or mental injury, and death. Because the risks are so great, your parenting style may be different for this issue than it is for others. Reassess and adjust your tactics if necessary.

Be Flexible

Recognize that each teen is different. If your child is well educated about the negative impact of drug and alcohol abuse but continues to use, what are your options? If your child is uncooperative or dishonest, what are you willing to do to protect them? Would it help to draw a hard line? Should you drug test your teen? These harsh tactics may be useful if they are building blocks to reforming a relationship of mutual trust and respect.

Ideally, an ongoing open, honest, and informed conversation with your teen will strengthen your relationship, build harmony and hopefully lead them to making the right choices when it comes to drugs and alcohol.

