

# The Truth About Drug Abuse

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10 THINGS  
YOU CAN DO TO KEEP  
YOUR CHILD DRUG FREE

Drug use is common among young people in the United States. By their senior year of high school, nearly half of all students in the U.S. have taken illegal drugs, legal “designer drugs,” or prescription drugs used for recreational purposes. Parents who avoid talking about drugs with their kids or simply trust school prevention programs to adequately prepare them, leave children in a dangerous and vulnerable position. Helping a young person successfully resist peer pressure to use drugs is a big part of ensuring a happy, healthy and fulfilling future.

## Illegal Drugs

Possessing or using drugs like methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, and LSD is illegal under any circumstances. This fact does not prevent dealers from trying hard to get these highly addictive substances into the hands of young people, who will become customers for life if they are successful. Criminal penalties for juveniles who are caught using illegal drugs can be harsh. More importantly, the fact that the government bans these drugs is an indication of their harmful effects on the body and mind.

## “Legal” Drugs

After marijuana, prescription and over-the-counter medications are the top most drugs abused. Prescription drug abuse is a huge problem in schools, especially when adults allow children access to them through their own neglect. Designer drugs, also known as “synthetic drugs”, are engineered to get around federal regulations and mimic the effects of better-known illegal drugs. Numerous household products are inhaled by children to get “high”. Parents should make sure to address all forms of drug use with their children, not just the higher-profile varieties like cocaine or marijuana.

## RESOURCES

Parents - The Antidrug:

800-662-HELP

[www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com)

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America:

[www.time totalk.org](http://www.time totalk.org)

Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse:

[www.cadasb.org](http://www.cadasb.org)

National Institute on Drug Abuse:

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

## Children At Highest Risk For Drugs:

- Have a negative example from others in their home
- Lack strong guidance against drug use from adults they respect
- Have poor academic achievement and lack interest in school
- Are rebellious, anti-social or alienated from society
- Have experimented with tobacco or alcohol
- Don't know the damaging effect of substance abuse



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## 1. Be Proactive

Talking early, often, and honestly are vital to keeping kids drug-free. Initiate an ongoing conversation about drugs with your child now, because the best time to talk about drugs is before they are exposed to them. Arm your child with the facts about drugs, including what they look like and what the signs of drug use are. Educate yourself about the drugs that are impacting your child's community.

## 2. Build Character

A young person who has strong support at home, is challenged to excel in school, and takes part in sports or other extracurricular programs is less likely to feel pressured to experiment with drugs. If a student is insecure, lonely, and feels like a failure, he will gravitate toward anyone who gives him attention—even a drug pusher, whose only goal is to addict your child to drugs.

## 3. Watch for Signals

There are telltale signs of drug abuse. Physically, a young person who is using drugs might display unusual fatigue and slowed mental functioning. Odd smells usually accompany drug use, especially when the drugs are smoked. Packages with obscure labels, objects that you can't immediately identify, and sudden secretive behavior are all warning signs that a child may be using drugs.

## 4. Answer Questions

When your child does ask you a question about drugs, answer immediately, honestly, and with the intention to make the most of the opportunity. Avoid putting off questions until later, responding with anger or a threat, and lying about any experiences you may have had about drugs. Research supports that honestly talking with your kids about your own past with drugs is best. Even young children can often tell when their parents are not being honest, and that can lead a child toward drugs instead of away from them.

## 5. Look for Opportunities to Talk About Drugs

A news story about a drug bust, an incident with someone at school, or even your own history could provide a valuable opportunity to bring up the subject of drugs. Many parents find it difficult to simply strike up a conversation about staying away from drugs; it is much easier to keep an eye out for a news story that could naturally lead to the subject.

## 6. Work with Your Community

Find out if your child's school has a drug prevention program. By volunteering, you can not only strengthen the program, but also show your child that keeping him and his schoolmates off drugs is important enough for your time and effort. You will also gain firsthand knowledge of any specific drug problems that exist in your child's everyday environment. Make a point to know



your child's friends and their parents. Work with your child and other parents to organize social activities that are fun and drug-free.

## 7. Practice Refusal Skills

Make sure your child knows exactly what to say when someone offers drugs. The more quickly he can get out of the situation, the less chance there is that something will go wrong. When drugs appear, your child should know that his priority is to get away as soon as possible—whether it means walking away from a friend, leaving a party early, or calling parents for transportation.



## 8. Educate About Legal Consequences

Penalties for use, possession, and sale of drugs are some of the nation's harshest legal consequences. Drug treatment, community service, high fines, and even jail time are possible for a young person who is caught with drugs. If your child expects to get into college, land a job, or take out a loan for a car in the future, he should avoid anything that would give him a criminal record.

## 9. Describe Medical Effects

Drugs work by directly triggering centers in the brain. This process is harmful to the brain, but also creates dependence. Drug abuse can lead to a much higher risk for dementia and Alzheimer's disease later in life, and can cause immediate brain damage or death at the moment of use. Even using low doses of drugs impairs mental function for days or weeks, making your child more vulnerable to physical harm, as well as making it impossible to adequately complete school work. The cardiovascular and muscle systems also suffer from exposure to drugs and quickly break down. The younger a user is, the more severe these medical effects are on the body.

## 10. Deal with Use Carefully

If you find out that your child has used drugs, the news will probably be unexpected, upsetting, and shocking. Your response is very important; it can either inspire your child to trust you for help or drive him farther away through fear or anger. When a young person suffers from drug dependency, the shame a parent may feel may worsen the situation if the parent withdraws and isolates themselves. It is important that parents connect to their personal support networks and reach out to agencies and resources in their community to help them bring their child safely out of the situation and on the track to recovery.

