



HOW AND WHEN DO I ...

Talk to my kids about alcohol and drugs?

Advice for Parents and Caregivers

- **Teens face intense pressure to fit in with their peers.** Show them you understand by building an open and supportive connection. Make it easy for them to talk about anything, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable, and let them know you'll listen without judgement.
 - **Warmth fuels honesty.** If your child feels loved and supported, they'll be more likely to open up to you and listen to what you have to say. Building a warm bond helps create a safe space for open communication and shared growth. Such a bond can be established — and strengthened — at any age.
 - When talking to your teen about drugs and alcohol, it's best to **focus on ways they can make positive choices and navigate risky environments.** Give your teen the tools they need to make responsible decisions.
 - For families with a history of substance use or for communities in which there is a high likelihood of exposure to substances, it's critically important to **have these conversations early, openly, and often.**
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- Scan to watch our video on this topic.**
- **Communication is key.** Be clear about your expectations for your child and share them openly. Rules and consequences, when explained with care, foster trust and open dialogue.
 - **Cycles of substance use and abuse can be very difficult to break.** If you're concerned about your child, approach them with love and support. Treatment works, and recovery is possible. Let them know you're there for them, no matter what.

7 Tips for Talking to Kids About Alcohol and Drugs

To learn more, check out these helpful resources:

[Why You Should Talk With Your Child About Alcohol and Other Drugs](#)
SAMHSA

[Drugs and Alcohol Resource Center](#)
The Child Mind Institute

[The New Drug Talk](#)
Song for Charlie

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We've become the leading independent nonprofit in children's mental health by providing gold-standard care, delivering educational resources to millions of families each year, training educators in underserved communities, and developing tomorrow's breakthrough treatments.

1. **Create an open dialogue.** Don't wait until after your child is exposed to drugs or alcohol to have frank and open conversations about it. It's especially important to start early if there is a family history or high community rates of substance abuse.
2. **Schedule the talk.** Give your child a heads up that you want to have an honest conversation about drinking and drugs. Let them know that this will be the start of an ongoing conversation and that you will continue to check in.
3. **Spell out the rules.** First, get clear with yourself about the rules and expectations you plan to set around substance use. Then clearly communicate those rules and specific consequences for breaking them.
4. **Explain your reasons.** Teens will be more receptive if you can lay out the reasoning behind your rules, which may include concerns about their health and safety, legal issues, the consequences of impaired judgment, or negative impacts on school performance.
5. **Treat teens with respect.** Try not to lecture or talk down to your child. Instead, treat them with respect and give them a chance to express their feelings or concerns. By doing this you're letting them know you expect them to act responsibly, not just because they want to follow the rules, but for their own wellbeing.
6. **Acknowledge stress and peer pressure.** Teens face pressure from all directions, so help equip them with healthy coping strategies and scripts for how to respond if presented with drugs or alcohol. Peer pressure is typically less obvious than in the movies, so help teens learn to recognize it and have the confidence to make their own choices.
7. **Safety first.** Emphasize that your child that their health, safety, and wellbeing are your top priorities. Rules should be forgiving in a way that reflects that. A child who's broken the rules should be able to ask for help without facing the same consequences had they hid their behavior. You can discuss the behavior later. But this way they will be less likely to put themselves at risk to avoid punishment.