

# A Parent's Role in Preventing Substance Use **PART 1**

## TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUTH OF ALL AGES

Involvement and support of parents, guardians and other caregivers are critical in preventing youth substance use. Conversations are one of the most effective tools adults can use to connect with youth. **Youth of parents who talk to their kids about the dangers of substances early and often are 50 percent less likely to use drugs than those who do not receive these critical messages at home.** (NCADD, 2015)

Tips for how to start the conversation and respond to children at every age are provided in this publication to help guide your discussion.



### HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD IS USING? Signs to watch for:

- Declining school performance
- Abrupt changes in friends
- Abnormal health issues or sleeping habits
- Deteriorating relationships with family
- Less openness and honesty



**9 OUT OF 10**  
*People with substance problems started Using by age 18.* (Center on Addiction, 2018)

*Every year substance use is delayed during adolescent brain development, the risk of addiction and substance abuse decreases 4 to 5 percent.* (SAMHSA, 2015)



### BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IS NOT COMPLETE UNTIL ABOUT AGE 25

Early to late adolescence is a **critical risk period** for youth to begin using drugs (SAMHSA, 2015). Essential parts of a teenager's brain are forming, affecting the ability to make logical decisions. Teens are more likely to take risks, and impulsive behaviors may involve drug use. Developing brains are more prone to damage. As a result, teens become addicted more quickly with greater consequences. Side effects may include irreversible brain changes, increasing the risk of accidents, homicides, suicides, and serious physical and mental health conditions (Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, 2018). Talk to teens about how substance use impacts their brain health and overall wellness.

**7x**

Youth who begin using addictive substances (tobacco, alcohol, illegal, including cannabis, over-the-counter or prescription drugs) before age 15 are nearly seven times more likely to develop a substance problem, compared with those who delay first use until age 21 or older. (Center on Addiction, 2018; Raising Placer, 2022)

### WHY DO YOUTH USE DRUGS?

A child may be more or less likely to try drugs due to certain circumstances. Below are **risk factors** that may increase vulnerability to use drugs and **protective factors** that reduce those risks.



Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Lack of parental supervision	Parental support and strong family bonds
Poor attachment with caregivers/ Other trauma exposure	Presence of mentors or adult role models
Academic problems	School and community engagement
Undiagnosed mental health problems	Coping and problem-solving skills
Substance-using parents, siblings or friends	Healthy peer groups/ supportive faith-based & cultural practices
Peer rejection	High self-esteem
Child abuse/neglect	Stable home environment

**Keep in mind:** Many youth with risk factors do not use drugs, and a risk factor for one person may not be for another.

# START HERE: HOW DO I TALK TO YOUTH ABOUT DRUGS?

## Get in the right frame of mind

TOOLS	POSITIVE COMMUNICATION	TRY IT OUT
Establish trust	It's important to establish trust to foster open communication and receptiveness to sensitive topics.	Control your emotions, don't overreact if they confess to use or mention having been offered substances
Keep an open mind	When youth feel judged or condemned, they are less likely to be receptive to your message.	Maintain a position of objectivity and openness. This may take practice.
Put yourself in their shoes	Consider the way you like to be talked to when speaking about a difficult subject.	Think about how you felt at their age.
Set boundaries	Be clear, direct and honest when setting limits. Let youth know you do not want them using drugs, and lay out the specific consequences if they break that rule.	Explain your reasons for not wanting them to use drugs and engage them in a discussion about the harmful consequences.
Be clear about your goals	After a conversation, you can review what went right, wrong, what goals were met and what to alter for next time.	Write down the goals to look back at after the discussion.
Be calm and relaxed	If you approach youth with anger or panic, achieving your goals will be challenging.	Find ways to relax before the conversation. Take a walk, call a friend or meditate.
Be honest	Approaching the situation with shame, anger or disappointment will be counter-productive. Be attentive, curious, respectful and understanding.	Stick to the facts; do not use scare tactics or make exaggerated claims. You want to build an environment of trust so they feel safe telling you the truth, even if it might be upsetting.
Find teaching opportunities	Use news, TV shows, movies, videos, social media or real-life situations as teachable moments.	Talk about the media's influence and encourage them to think critically about these messages.
Don't lecture	Lecturing about drugs likely will lead to youth shutting down, tuning out or becoming angry, or it could be misinterpreted as your disapproval of them instead of their actions. This could lead to shame and in turn, substance use behaviors.	Avoid pulling rank if you get frustrated. Saying "You can't because I'm your parent and I said so" is highly ineffective.
Find a comfortable setting	Announcing a sit-down meeting ("We need to have a talk after dinner") usually will be met with resistance, while a more spontaneous, casual approach will lower their anxiety and maybe even your own.	Take a walk or sit in the yard or park. Look for a place that feels less confined but not too distracting.
Be aware of body language	If your child is sitting, you want to be sitting as well. If the child is standing, ask the child to sit down with you.	Be mindful of finger-pointing and crossed arms; these are closed gestures, while uncrossed legs and a relaxed posture are open gestures.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### 211 Placer

<https://211connectingpoint.org/placer-county>

### 1PillCanKillPlacer.com

<https://1pillcankillplacer.com/>

### A Parent's Guide to Drug Prevention

[www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/growing-up-drug-free-2017.pdf](http://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/growing-up-drug-free-2017.pdf)

### Parent Resources

[www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources](http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources)

### Family Checkup: Positive Parenting

[www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup](http://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup)

### Set Limits and Monitor (create a contract)

<https://drugfree.org/article/set-limits-monitor>

### Helpful Links for Parents

<https://nida.nih.gov/drug-topics/parents-educators>

### Talking to Youth and Young Adults to Prevent E-cigarette Use

<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/features/back-to-school>

### Let's Talk: Parent's Guide to Start a Conversation

[https://healthcollaborative.org/performing-above-the-high/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2020/07/cahc\\_parlier\\_letstalkflyer.pdf](https://healthcollaborative.org/performing-above-the-high/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2020/07/cahc_parlier_letstalkflyer.pdf)

### Marijuana Talk Kit: What you need to know to talk to your teen about marijuana

[https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Marijuana\\_Talk\\_Kit.pdf](https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Marijuana_Talk_Kit.pdf)

### Preventing Drug Use: Connecting/talking with Your Teen

<https://drugfree.org/article/connecting-with-your-teen/>

### Vaping Conversation Guide

<https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking/helping-teens-quit/talk-about-vaping/conversation-guide>

For more coaching tips, find part 2 at [RaisingPlacer.org](http://RaisingPlacer.org).