

Positive Parenting

How To Talk to Your Teen About Drugs, Alcohol and Sex

Those difficult topics – what a challenge – where and when do you start?

The most important issue of all is that you must try, no matter how difficult these topics are for you to discuss. It is also critical that the discussions are ongoing and that they begin early when your child is quite young (ages 8 or 9). Teens must be educated about drugs, alcohol and sex – the consequences of their actions and possible legal problems. Teens must be taught ways “to get out of” difficult situations with their peers.

For example, teach your teen to say:

1. My mom would ground me for life if I did that.
2. I can't go to the party because I'm already busy that night.
3. My dad won't let me go.

The easiest way to talk to your teen is when the opportunity presents itself. Don't wait for a problem to occur. You may have just watched a T.V. show together, read an article in the paper or heard about a friend who has had a problem. If you have some alone time with your teen, you may wish to initiate a discussion.

Some conversation starters might be:

- Have you heard about any kids you know using drugs?
- Have you talked about smoking, drugs and alcohol at school?
- Did you see that show on T.V. about AIDS?
- How do you feel when you see kids smoking?

Drugs and Alcohol

Parents must set a good example. You can't tell your teens not to smoke, drink or use drugs and then do these things yourselves.

Try not to do all the talking. You need to listen to what teens have to say. Also avoid lecturing. Try to treat your teen with respect and show them that you trust them

Teens must be aware of your feelings about the use of drugs and alcohol. A **no tolerance** policy must be made clear to your teens. If they break one of the rules, there should be consequences and the consequences should be appropriate for the rule that was broken.

If your teen is discovered smoking, drinking or using drugs, take a breath, don't panic and control your anger. Pick a time and place to talk to your child and make it a serious discussion. If it becomes a continuous problem don't hesitate to seek professional help and counselling.

Parents also need to know who their teens "hang out" with. Get to know your teen's friends and their families, especially if your child is asking to attend parties at their friend's house or is going to sleepovers. Find out if the party or sleep over will be supervised.

Things to look out for if you suspect drug or alcohol use:

- behavioural changes – need for money, skipping classes, failing grades
- mood changes – secretive, withdrawn, depression
- physical changes- sleep disturbance, weight loss, trouble talking, red eyes

Sex

It is important that your teen be aware of:

- the responsibilities and the risk involved with sexual activity
- birth control, pregnancy, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases
- how to access information and where to go for information
- dating guidelines – curfew, off limit places, safety issues
- being able to say "No" to unwanted sex

Where to go for Help:

1. Family doctor
2. Public Health Department
3. Public Library
4. Birth Control Centre
5. Sexual Assault Centre
6. Alcohol and Drug Treatment Centre

Tip: Be there, ready to listen when your teen feels like talking or has a problem.