

TALKING TIPS FOR PARENTS ABOUT DRUGS

- The best time to talk about drugs is when your child brings up the topic.
- If you must raise the subject, pick a time and place that you and your child will be comfortable and undisturbed.
- Remember that communication is key. Listen to everything your child has to say.
- Observe non-verbal cues they will let you know how the conversation is progressing.
- Listening means paying attention to what is said verbally and non-verbally.
- Communication should not be a one-time or one-way process.
- Talk with your child often about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.
- Parents, family members, and caring adults have the best chance of helping children grow up drug free.
- Parents don't have to project a perfect image to be an effective communicator. If you smoke, have an occasional cocktail or have experimented with drugs in the past, share this experience with your child.
- Discussing drugs clarifies information; it doesn't invite them to use substances.
- It is okay to share with your child that the subject may be uncomfortable for you to talk about; let them know it is your anxiety not something they have done.

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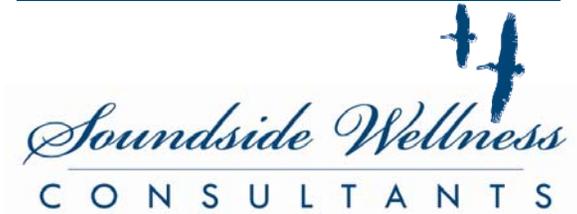
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Resources and Informational Websites:

Information for this brochure was taken from the American Council for Drug Education's website at www.acde.org



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PARENTS, KIDS, AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

At What Age Should I Discuss Drugs?

Pre-School:

At this age, children have not become drug users but it is not too early to talk to them about drugs. What they hear and learn now will impact their future years. Children who resist early drug experimentation often are more adept at problem-solving and self-help. It is important for parents to ensure the foundations for these skills are laid down during the preschool years.

School-aged:

Children at this age are eager to be independent and grown-up. School opens up a new world beyond that of family. Friends take on an important relationship in a child's life and friends' opinions are often more important than that of family. As reading skills expand, messages about drugs and alcohol may conflict with the messages you give your child. Rules and limits are important to have in place. Let your child know what is allowed at home and school and what isn't.

Young Adolescents:

These are children between 10 and 15 years old and are beginning to have feelings of insecurity, doubt, and pressure at home and school. Adolescents look to each other for support and often defines what is worn, what music is listened to, and what activities to participate in. At this age children can be influenced by their peer group when relating to drug and alcohol use and outside activities. At this age, children become concerned with appearances, if they think drugs and alcohol will make them look bad they are unlikely to be tempted to use them.

Listening Strategies

Children are astute and pick up feelings easily. Non-verbal cues will send messages to your child, so consider the position of your chair, the tone of your voice, your eye contact and facial expressions.

Give your child an opportunity to talk: Stop talking and give your child time to complete his or her thoughts and process what has been said.

Demonstrate interest by asking appropriate questions: Questions can help you clarify your child's thoughts and suggestions. Be sure that you are interpreting what has been said correctly.

Listen to the complete message: Listen to the total message before forming a response.

Encourage your child to talk: Use door-opening statements such as "tell me what is going on..." that invite a response.

Focus on content, not delivery: Avoid being distracted by your child's poor grammar or manners. It is what is being said that is important.

Listen for main ideas: Try to pick out the conversations central theme.

Deal effectively with emotionally-charged language: Be aware of words or phrases that produce anxiety and trigger emotions.

Identify areas of common experience and agreement: Note similar experiences of your own or offer a shared point of view to communicate acceptance and understanding.

Deal effectively with whatever blocks you from listening: Be aware of personal blocks that may prevent you from hearing what your child is saying.

Signs and Symptoms of Drug Use

Physical Signs:

Loss/increase of appetite, unexplained weight loss or gain; poor physical coordination; inability to sleep, awake at unusual times, unusual laziness; red, watery eyes, pupils larger or smaller than usual or a blank stare; cold, sweaty palms; shaking hands; puffy face, blushing or paleness; smell of substance on breath, body, or clothes; extreme hyperactivity; excessive talkativeness; runny nose, hacking cough; needle marks on lower arm, leg, or bottom of feet; nausea, vomiting, or excessive sweating; tremors or shakes of hands, feet, or head; irregular heartbeat.

Behavioral Signs:

Change in overall attitude/personality with no other identifiable cause; changes in friends; new hang-outs; sudden avoidance of old crowd; doesn't want to talk about new friends; friends are known drug users; change in activities or hobbies; drop in grades at school or performance at work; skips school or is late for school; change in habits at home; loss of interest in family and family activities; difficulty in paying attention; forgetfulness; general lack of motivation, energy, self-esteem, "I don't care" attitude; sudden oversensitivity, temper tantrums, or resentful behavior; moodiness, irritability, or nervousness; silliness or giddiness; paranoia; excessive need for privacy; unreachable; secretive or suspicious behavior; car accidents; chronic dishonesty; unexplained need for money, stealing money or items; change in personal grooming habits.