

How do I talk to my teenager about drugs?

Talking to your teen about alcohol and other drugs can be challenging. It's hard to know where to start. You might worry that if you raise the topic, it will somehow encourage your child to experiment. You might feel unsure about the subject or feel that your teen's decisions are beyond your control. These feelings of doubt and uncertainty are all normal.

Here are ten tips to help you:

- Work on listening to your child. Make sure your child knows you care about what he or she has to say. The more you listen, the more likely your teen will open up and tell you about their worries, who they like hanging out with, what they enjoy doing and what is important to them.
- Educate yourself. Get accurate, up-to-date facts about alcohol and the other drugs your child may encounter. AADAC's website, aadac.com, is a reliable source. Share this information with your teen to ensure you both have the same understanding.
- Set guidelines for behaviour in discussion with your teenager. Be clear about the consequences of both appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.
- Look at life through your child's eyes. Help your teen to make sense of lifestyles seen in advertising and on TV shows. Use examples from the media as openings to talk about drugs and decision-making.
- Encourage questions. Teens often have lots, but are reluctant to ask because they worry about appearing naive. This can lead them into social situations and actions they feel unsure about but are too embarrassed to avoid.
- Avoid the temptation to use scare tactics. These can actually backfire, as your teen may know people who use particular drugs and are not addicted. So, for example, telling them that everyone becomes addicted to a drug could lead them to believe it's all a lie and to not trust anything else you tell them about drugs.
- Don't judge when you respond to questions. Once your teen learns to trust you, they'll be more likely to ask for your opinion on issues such as sexual relationships, and the pressure to use alcohol and other drugs.
- Share your own stories. Perhaps there are some incidents from your own past that you would like to tell your teen. Hearing how you dealt with pressures could be helpful to your child.
- Let your child know that it is natural to have problems and make mistakes.
- Practise what you preach; your child may not take your concern seriously if you don't demonstrate responsible decision-making in your own use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Keep in mind that your children look up to you. If they see you making healthy decisions, they will be more likely to make healthy choices themselves.

For more information, contact your local AADAC office or call the AADAC Help Line at 1-866-33AADAC. We are available to give you information and support.

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