Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
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Factsheet

Talking to your child about e-cigarettes/vaping



Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our Help/Q&A section for more details.

Year:

Targeted Drugs: Electronic Cigarettes/Vaping

Tags: effective communication, vaping, e-cigarettes

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Talking to your child about e-cigarettes/vaping

E-cigarettes/vapes are spoken about a lot, and your child could see them on social media, through friends or other sources. They may have questions and may even have tried them. It's important to have open communication with your child, to help them as they face new experiences and challenges.

Here are some tips for talking about e-cigarettes with your child:

Prepare for the conversation

Gather information to make sure you understand what e-cigarettes are, their effects, and the laws for the use of e-cigarettes in your area. Some resources include:

- Drugs A to Z: Electronic Cigarettes and Vaping factsheet
- Factsheet: E-cigarettes, vaping and the law
- Webinar: E-cigarettes and vaping in young people – where to from here? (Dr Emily Stockings)
- Video: Vaping – Respect Your Brain

Having the conversation

- You could look through the factsheets with your child or watch the video together.
  - This may make the conversation easier, as the information is coming from a reputable third party and will feel less like a lecture.
- There are many myths about e-cigarettes that you could address and help them understand. For example:
  - **Fact:** Many e-cigarettes are incorrectly labelled and contain nicotine even if they say they don't.
  - **Fact:** Nicotine e-cigarette products can only be legally obtained through a pharmacy.
  - More myths and facts are available in our Drugs A to Z: Electronic Cigarettes and Vaping factsheet and E-cigarettes, and vaping and the law factsheet.
- Discuss how to say no if they are offered an e-cigarette. The Making Choices factsheet shares some options that can help young people handle these situations.

When you think your child may be using e-cigarettes

If you think your child is using e-cigarettes, here are some tips to help you support them and communicate effectively about their use:

Arrange a suitable time to talk

- **Arrange a suitable time to talk** where you will have some privacy and won't be interrupted. Try to do this in a location that your child feels comfortable in. Talking about this topic may feel challenging for your child, so think about whether you can walk and talk, talk whilst you are driving, or sit side-by-side so there is less pressure. You could also bring it up when you see an e-cigarette shop or vaping is mentioned in a TV show.

Avoid making assumptions

- It is OK to ask directly about e-cigarette use, but don't make assumptions. Try to find out what your child's life is like. Be relaxed and give them a chance to express their views. This helps to maintain trust.
  - It is also important to remember that many young people who try e-cigarettes will only try a few 'puffs', while others may use them more regularly and develop nicotine dependence (see glossary)

Express concerns but avoid being judgemental or confrontational

- The conversation will be most effective if you avoid judging or lecturing. This can be really hard, but you are more likely to get through to your child if you have a two-way conversation. Don't use negative terms like "disgusting" as this is only going to make them feel worse and they might close up. Let them know you care about them. They are more likely to listen if they feel valued and respected.
- Use a supportive and non-confrontational manner to express your concerns. Try to use statements which include "I" as this doesn't put the blame on them. Instead of saying "You make me feel worried when you vape" say something like "I feel worried about you vaping".
- Have some specific examples ready that show the behaviours that you are worried about, in case you get a "like what?" in response.

Listen and problem solve together

- Listen to your child and give them space to express their thoughts and feelings about e-cigarettes. Evidence shows that "motivational" conversations are most helpful. Talking about what they "like" about using e-cigarettes can be a good way to open up the conversation.
- Understanding your child's reasons for vaping will be important to make sure they get what they need without using e-cigarettes. After speaking about what they like about e-cigarettes, you can ask "Are there any things you don't like so much about using e-cigarettes?". It is useful to open a conversation where your child can voice some of the negatives they have noticed related to e-cigarette use. Watch Making the Link to see some examples of motivating conversations with young people.
- Let them know you are available to talk in the future. This conversation is a first step in an ongoing conversation about drug and alcohol use, and it is important that your child knows they can talk about it again.
- Be aware that your child may not believe their e-cigarette use is harmful. A negative reaction does not mean the conversation was futile – it may take some time for them to process what has been said.

Supporting your child to quit e-cigarettes/vaping

Your child may want advice or support to quit vaping/e-cigarette use. Here are some tips to get started:

Communicate that change is possible, but can take some time

- Discuss barriers they may face when trying to stop e-cigarette use and help think of ways to overcome these barriers. For example, you could brainstorm different ways to deal with pressure from peers or activities to help them relax.
- Communicate that there is effective help available to help people reduce or stop their e-cigarette use. Tell them that you will support them to find the right services when they are ready.
- If your child is dependent on e-cigarettes, quitting can be a difficult process. It would be unreasonable to expect extreme changes to your child's behaviour straight away. However, you have taken the important first step by starting a conversation with them.

Getting support

- It might be important to seek professional help. A GP or health worker can provide cessation support for young people who are dependent on nicotine.
- You can also encourage your child to contact Quitline either online or over the phone (13 7848).
- Quitline can also provide information and guidance to help you support your child to stop using e-cigarettes. Aboriginal and multilingual counsellors are available.

E-cigarettes/vaping resources

There are a number of evidence-based resources available here.

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney.

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