Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
Get informed, stay smart, stay safe

Factsheet

Talking to a young person about alcohol and other drugs



Evidence ratings:

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

Year:

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol, Cannabis, Drugs (General), Emerging Drugs (“Legal Highs”), "Ice" (Methamphetamine), MDMA/Ecstasy, Tobacco

Tags: effective communication

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Talking to a young person about alcohol and other drugs

Alcohol and drug use are linked with short and long-term harms. These relate to how much someone is using, how much their use affects their life and the lives of those around them. **As a parent, it is important to talk with your child openly about alcohol and drug use.** Rather than one conversation, think of this as a series of talks as your child develops, and comes across new experiences and challenges.

"There is a need for open communication and to reassure your teen that you are understanding of their situation."
-Laura*, 41

Here are some tips to help you support them and encourage them to communicate openly with you:

- **Prepare your child in advance, before they are exposed to alcohol and other drugs or learn about these substances from others.** Equip your child with accurate information and facts, so they can make informed choices about how to stay safe when the time comes.
- **Gather information** to make sure you know about different drugs, their effects and risks. Organise your thoughts and have a clear idea of what it is you want to say. Think about how you will answer any questions they have, for example, questions about whether you have used drugs.

Approach the conversation in a calm way. You might use something you watched together on TV as a starting point for the conversation, for example asking their thoughts on a news report about drug use at a music festival.

- When discussing alcohol and drug use with young people it is useful to **be open, and not lecture or exaggerate the facts.** Listen to their views, and make it clear they can talk to you if they have any questions or concerns in the future.
- **Clearly express your expectations and rules about drug and alcohol use, and explain why the rules are important.** For example, you might explain that you are concerned about drug and alcohol use because of evidence that it affects teenage brain development, and can lead to risky situations. Make sure that other parents who may supervise your child (for example, at a birthday party) are also aware of your rules and expectations.
- Calmly address any myths about drugs and alcohol. For example, one of the most widely held myths is the idea that it is common or normal to use drugs, when **in fact the vast majority of young people have never tried an illegal drug.** Encourage the young person to find out for themselves by exploring our drug factsheets.
- It is OK to ask directly about alcohol and drug use; but **don’t make assumptions** that they are using drugs.
- **Be prepared for a negative reaction**. A negative reaction does not mean the conservation wasn't helpful – it may take some time to process what has been said. Stay calm and reasonable. Don’t let it turn into an argument.
- Let them know you care about them and **remind them of their good qualities**. Young people will be more likely to listen and take advice on board if they feel valued and respected.

See also our factsheets:

- How can I tell if someone is using drugs
- Starting a conversation when you are concerned about drug and alcohol use

See Where to get help for a list of services that help people of all ages affected by drugs.

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, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University. SeeParent booklet for more information.

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