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

Factsheet

Talking to your child when you're worried about alcohol or other drug use (Simplified English)

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

Tags: Simplified English, effective communication, motivational conversations, getting support

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

1. Prepare for the talk

If you think your child is using alcohol or other drugs, it's important to talk to them openly. This will connect them to you, even during hard times. Starting the talk about a young person's possible alcohol or other drug use can be difficult. Having the first chat may not solve anything, but it can be an important step so your child trusts you and feels able to talk to you. Here are some tips to start:

- Get information to understand what drug your child may be using and its effects. Relate this to how your child is acting, and see whether it matches their situation. Have an idea of what it is that worries you about their drug use.
- Pick a good time to talk where you will have some privacy and won't be disturbed. Find a location that your child feels comfortable.
- Start the talk when the person is not affected by drugs or alcohol. If this is difficult, try to pick a time when they look less affected than others (for example, in the morning).
- It is fine to ask openly about drug use, but don't guess that they are using drugs, how often, or why they use it. Try to find out what your child's life is like. Be calm and give them a chance to explain their side.
- Have some specific examples ready that show the behaviours you are worried about, in case you get "like what?" in response.

2. Talk about your worries calmly

- The talk will be helpful if you avoid judging or lecturing, instead stay calm. Don't use negative words like "addict", this will make them feel bad and stop talking. Let them know you care about them. People are more likely to listen if they feel loved and respected.
- Try to use sentences which include "I" as this doesn't blame them. Instead of saying "You make me feel worried when you use this drug" say something like "I feel worried about your drug use".
- Listen to the young person and express your concerns in a supportive way. Try to understand why they are using the drug. This can be difficult as alcohol or drug use may go against your religious beliefs and/or cultural practices. As upsetting as drug use can be, the young person has reasons for using.

3. Talk about how change is possible, but it can take some time

- Tell them you are available to talk anytime. This first chat might not cover all your worries. It is a first step in a continuing conversation about drug and alcohol use, and it is important they know they can talk about it again with you. Ask “permission” to check in with them again in a week to see how they are doing.

- Be aware that the young person may not think their drug or alcohol use is unsafe. They may become upset or angry when you talk about it. If this happens, stay on the topic of their drug use and related behaviours, instead of bringing up other parts of their personality or any previous fights. A negative reaction does not mean the conversation was a waste of time – it may take some time for them to understand what has been said.

- Let them know that there is help available for people to reduce or stop alcohol or other drug use. Tell them that you will support them to find the right services when they are ready. If they do not want to change, encourage them to learn how to reduce their risk of harm until they’re ready to stop using alcohol or other drugs.

- Recovery can be a long and hard process. You can not expect the young person to change straight away. Taking the first step and talking with them is very helpful though.

4. Look after yourself

Supporting a loved one in this process can be hard, and it is important to look after yourself too.

- Remember you can’t force them to change. Only they can take steps to cut down or stop their use.
- Take time out for your own needs and hobbies.
- Get support by talking to trusted friends and going to events or support groups.

5. Getting support

It can be hard to, but it is better to reach out for help. Talk to a friend that you can trust. Your GP or a health worker can also be helpful– they can discuss your worries with you in private and help find other services if you need more support.

© 2026 Positive Choices | Built by Netfront