



Phoenix House
Rising Above Addiction

Talking to Your Kids Before They've Used Drugs

Discussions with your kids about substance use and abuse will differ based on whether you are trying to prevent them from starting to use alcohol and other drugs, stop them from experimenting, or seeking help once they've developed a problem. Here are some tips to help you “parent for prevention” by discussing alcohol and other drug rules before your kids ever use.

Family Behavior Policies

- Express an appropriate level of concern about alcohol and other drug use. Has there been a history of use by a family member? Do you simply want to make sure your family's future stays drug-free?
- Spell out your expectations regarding alcohol and other drug use, rather than waiting to bring up the topic after your teen has begun to experiment (most do) or after they've developed a problem.
- Bring the family together for a meeting. State your position on issues such as alcohol and other drug use, sex and relationships, or even screen time (Internet, television, PlayStation/Wii, etc.).
- Explain what is allowed, what is not, and what the consequences will be if rules are broken. Your teen may not agree with you, but it is fair for you to ask them to follow these rules.
- Negotiate on less important rules (how much screen topics (alcohol and other drug use). Buy-in now will make it easier for teens to follow the rules later.
- Consider writing down the rules and having everyone sign them — especially if you are worried that your children may claim, “I didn't know about that rule,” or “You said something different.”
- If your children have two different homes, be sure that all the adults in a parenting role agree on family rules, so your children will not take advantage of one home's looser standards.

Family Together Time

Make time for family dinners as often as possible. It may seem challenging at first, but after a while, it will become routine and enjoyable. Make sure everyone helps prepare the meal and helps clean up afterwards. Use this “together time” to talk about your child’s day and get updates on important issues — such as whether or not they have been offered alcohol or other drugs.

Extracurricular Activities

Unscheduled after-school and weekend hours are often the times when teens get into trouble. Keep your kids involved with enjoyable activities that keep them busy; if school, sports, or other standard activities are not appealing to your teen, think about volunteer opportunities or after-school jobs. These activities provide young people with a chance to become more responsible, work alongside adults, and develop new skills. Teens and parents may even volunteer together to build their relationship in a fun and neutral zone.

Be An Aware Parent

Show up to your teen’s activities, even when they don’t expect it! Make it a point to get to know your teen’s friends and their parents. If there’s going to be a party, call to see if a parent will be home. Use Facebook or Twitter to help connect with other parents who want to stay on top of their teen’s activities. Make sure teens call you from a landline to let you know their whereabouts, and insist on quick callbacks when you call them on their cell phone.

Provide Teens With Easy Outs

Teens don’t want to be embarrassed in front of their peers. So help them come up with “easy outs” when offered alcohol or other drugs.

- Teach them excuses, such as “I can’t drink alcohol, use cigarettes or other drugs because my parents do drug tests” or “I can’t get high because I have a doctor’s appointment tomorrow and they might need a urine sample.”
- Create a family “code.” Your teen could tell their peers that they have to call home, and then tell you a code phrase such as “I’m not ready to come home yet” to let you know that they are in an uncomfortable situation. This makes it appear to their friends that you are forcing them to come home, allowing your teen to save face while getting them out of the situation.

Remember: Addiction Is A Disease

If you sense that your teen is experimenting or that their substance use or abuse is starting to escalate, seek assistance quickly. Talk to someone at your child’s school, a substance abuse counselor, or a youth clergy person. You run to the doctor if you think your child has strep throat. Why shouldn’t you do the same for a teen who might be in the early stages of the chronic brain disease we know as addiction?

For more information call 1800 DRUG HELP.
www.phoenixhouse.org