



What Parents Can Do About Drugs and Alcohol

According to National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD) recent scientific research indicated that the longer a person postpones the onset of drug, tobacco or alcohol use, the less likely that person is to develop an addiction or other problem. Research also indicated that kids who have conversations with their parents concerning drugs and alcohol use are 50% less likely to become users than those who don't have such conversations. Two out of three kids ages 13-17 stated that losing their parents' respect is one of the main reasons they don't drink, smoke or use other drugs. Given these statistics, it only makes sense to start talking to our kids right now.

Although the conversation you have with your 7-year-old will be different than the one you have with your 16-year-old, it's never too early to start helping your children build the skills needed to handle the stress, peer pressure and disappointments that are part of growing up. These same skills will help them keep away from the pitfalls of drug and alcohol use as well.

Basic Guidelines for Parents

- Listen Before You Talk – Encourage Conversation: For kids, knowing that we are really listening is the most important thing we can do to help.
- Talk to Your Child and Ask Open Ended Questions: Converse regularly – about their feelings, friends and activities. Try to avoid questions that have a simple “yes” or “no” answer.
- Be Involved – Get to know your kids' friends. Ask your children about their day and listen to them talk about school, social events, their classmates and activities.
- Set Expectations, Limits and Consequences: Make it clear you don't want your child drinking or using drugs. Discuss legal and medical consequences as well as the consequences they will face at home if the rules are broken.
- Be Positive, Honest and Open: Many parents have discovered that conversations with their kids about drugs and alcohol have built bridges rather than walls
- Family History: Both research and personal experience have clearly documented that addiction is a chronic, progressive disease that can be linked to family history and genetics.

Some Prevention Tips

- The Foundation of Parental Prevention: Establish Clear Family Rules – Some ideas: *Kids under 21 will not drink alcohol. Kids under 21 won't host or attend parties without parental supervision. Kids will not stay at a party where drugs and alcohol are present. Kids will not ride in a car with someone who has been drinking or using drugs.* Consistent enforcement of the rules and following through on clearly established consequences are essential. Without consequences the rules have no value and will not work.
- Give Your Child a Good Starting Point to Say No – Take a tough stand when it comes to prohibiting alcohol and drug use. Your decisions and your rules allow your child to use you as the reason for not using drugs and alcohol. “My mom and dad would kill me if I drank or used drugs.”
- Connect With Your Child's Friends – Pay attention to who your child's friends are and get to know them. Encourage your child to invite them over – and make them feel welcome.
- Make Connections With Other Parents Too – As you get to know your kids friends, take the opportunity to introduce yourself to their parents for mutual support.
- Promote Healthy Activities: Physical activities and exercise bring positive physical and mental benefits. Encourage community activities such as the arts, sports or a part-time job.
- Get Educated About Alcohol and Drugs – You can't possibly know it all – and you don't want to get it wrong when you're sharing. A great place to learn more is: www.ncadd.org.
- Be a Positive Role Model – To kids, what you do is more important than what you say. Research shows the parents who drink/use drugs are more likely to have kids who use. If you drink alcohol, use moderation. If you medicate, use only as directed. If you host a party, have an alternative non-alcoholic beverage offering and don't let anyone drink and drive.
- Keep Track of Your Child's Activities: Asking questions, keeping track, checking in are all important. Research shows kids not regularly monitored are for times more likely to use.
- Keep Track of Alcohol and Prescription Drugs – For kids, the most common source of alcohol and prescription drugs is parents. That goes for tobacco products too.
- Get Help – If at any point you suspect that your child is having a problem with alcohol and/or drugs, get help. To effectively help your child it is important to first get support for yourself.

Some warning signs that your child may be abusing drugs or alcohol

- *Physical and health warning signs of drug abuse:* Bloodshot eyes or pupils that are smaller or larger than normal; Frequent nosebleeds; Changes in appetite or sleep patterns; Sudden weight loss or gain; Impaired coordination, unexplained injuries; Unusual smells on breath body or clothes; Shakes, tremors, slurred speech.
- *Behavioral signs of alcohol or drug abuse:* drop in attendance/performance at school/work; complaints from friends, supervisors, teachers; missing cash, valuables and prescription drugs; acting isolated, withdrawn; Demanding more privacy, locking doors, avoiding eye-contact; Sudden change in relationships; Frequently getting into trouble.
- *Psychological warning signs of alcohol or drug abuse:* Unexplained change in personality and/or attitude; Sudden mood changes, irritability, outbursts; Period of hyperactivity, agitation; Lack of motivation, inability to focus; Appears lethargic, fearful, anxious or paranoid for no apparent reason.



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Getting Help:

The NCADD has an excellent list of referrals for help and support.

For immediate assistance, please call 1-800-NCA-CALL (622-2255) or go to their website **at** www.ncadd.org to search their National Network of affiliates to identify and contact the NCADD Affiliate in your community.