

# Conversation Starters for Parents

*Many parents aren't sure how to talk to their kids about drugs, alcohol, sex and other tough topics. While each family is unique, below are some ideas that may help you.*

- 1. Seize the moment.** Take advantage of any opportunity to talk to your kids. Maybe your child will share the story of a ninth grader who was caught with marijuana in school. Or, maybe over dinner one night your child discloses that one of her friends is "doing things" with her boyfriend. Use these moments to talk honestly and openly with your kids about these topics. Ask them open ended questions to foster further conversation, "What do you think of what your friend is doing?"; or "What do you think might happen to that ninth grader?" Kids are curious by nature; allow the conversation to flow freely between you and your child.
- 2. Listen to your child.** Encourage your kids to talk to you by listening to them without over-reacting when they open up to you, it will help them feel more comfortable talking to you. You may be surprised to find out how much your child already knows about drugs, alcohol and sex when you really listen to them. Be aware of your tone and the length of your responses, your child may perceive a long response as a lecture and not feel comfortable opening up to you again.
- 3. Be clear that drug use is not acceptable in your family.** Set the rules and consequences for breaking the rules, be sure both parents are

on the same page and remain consistent with your parenting. Some families write a contract to be sure that everyone understands the expectations and consequences. Consistency with respect to enforcing rules and consequences is a key factor in shaping your child's behavior. Rewards for honoring rules are a great way to reinforce good decision-making.

- 4. Ask your child what he or she knows.** Ask questions such as, "What have you heard about drugs from your friends and teachers?" or, "I received this drug test kit at school tonight, what do you think?" Let your child answer the question without interruption and then acknowledge them for their openness. Take opportunities such as these to start a two-way discussion. Be sure to have educated yourself prior to this conversation so you can answer all of your child's questions accurately. If you don't know an answer, don't guess, be honest and tell your child you will find out the answer or you risk losing their confidence.
- 5. Use daily events, such as television shows and news reports, as conversation starters.** Share a news story or local incident with your child—an automobile accident resulting from someone under the influence, or a drug arrest—to start a conversation. Ask your child how they would feel if they caused an accident or were arrested because they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. How would this affect their future? You may also want to discuss the risks and possible catastrophic consequences from poor decisions made while using drugs or alcohol.
- 6. Give your child words to use with their friends if asked to use drugs.** Give your child words to have in their mind to use if situations arise where drugs are offered. It will be easier for your child to respond if they have a few planned phrases and a strategy for leaving the situation. One possible response is, "I can't. My parents have a drug test kit at home and they might test me."



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