

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY OR TOO LATE TO TALK ABOUT SUBSTANCE PREVENTION!

Talking Early (substance use prevention conversations before middle school) helps these topics feel 'normal', decreasing 'taboo' and/or 'stigma'. Your children will know it is important, and ok, to talk about uncomfortable things.

Talking Often (frequent, short conversations) make more of an impact than occasional, long lectures.

Listening is important too! Sometimes young people feel their whole day is adults asking them questions. When we listen, we tell them we care about their thoughts - we care about them. They are actually the experts on what's impacting their lives.

Looking for casual times to talk (in the car, over dinner, while watching a t.v. show) can sometimes help ease the pressure for you and your child.

Help your child practice saying 'No' Saying 'no' can be awkward and uncomfortable when we're taught that it's disrespectful but Refusal Skills are important in preventing risky behaviors!

"Be the Bad Guy" Help your child create a password and an escape plan so when they're in a tough situation, you can be the bad guy. If they text or call with the password, tell them you're picking them up/they have to come because they didn't do homework, etc.

Elementary Talking Points

- 3-5 Years Old: point out poisonous & harmful household substances and explain why children should only put good things in their bodies. Explain how even good things, like medicine prescribed by a doctor for illness, can be harmful if not used correctly.
- 6-8 Years Old: Explain why adults may drink alcohol (it's legal) but why children may not (it harms a child's ability to learn and develop important social skills).
- 9-11 Years Old: Explain that all medications should stay in their original containers to avoid confusion with candy or other medicines, how medicine can make a person feel (side effects), and the risk of taking too much. Start talking about vaping.

Middle/High School Talking Points

- Ask why they think young people might use alcohol and other drugs. Talk with them about why it's not a good choice no matter the reason.
- Brainstorm with your child about the consequences of alcohol and other drug use. Help them think beyond physical effects to consider the mental/emotional and social effects as well.
- Explain that their brain is still developing and using any substances will have harmful, and potentially permanent, effects on how the brain functions. Be prepared to talk about the reality of addiction - which starts because of chemical changes in the brain.
- Include prescription and over-the-counter medications in your talks. Explain that medicine dosage is determined by body weight, medical history, etc. and that someone else's prescription will not have the same effect on them. Before college, make sure your child knows how to lock up and track their medicine to make sure it's not being stolen.
- Set ground rules, model expectations, and be clear on consequences. This applies to alcohol and drug use as well as positive experiences too, like healthy strategies for dealing with stress.

