

Tips For Talking With A Teen About Drugs



Parents or caregivers who want to talk with their teen about drugs should prepare for the conversation. Planning for the discussion can lay the foundation for positive outcomes.

Make A Plan

Prior to talking with their teen, parents or caregivers should:

- Go for a walk, sit where they can't be disturbed, and think about what they want to say
- Organize their thoughts and reflect on the facts of the situation
- Try to resolve feelings of anger and betrayal, as they won't be useful during the conversation and may result in the youth tuning out
- Decide what they want to say to their teen
- Think about what addiction resources they may need— online resources or printed information, or guidance from a healthcare provider, counselor, or faith leader
- Keep a dated journal of their feelings, discussions, and progress so that they can begin to identify a pattern of behavior

Present The Facts

Parents or caregivers should open the discussion by affirming their love and concern for their teen. Then, they can share a statement of the facts, as they know them:

- They found drug paraphernalia in the youth's room
- The teen has violated curfew
- The adolescent's grades have slipped
- The youth has changed from being a "good kid" to someone who is getting into trouble at home, school, or in the community
- The teen has become quiet, secretive, and has changed from the person they used to know

Listen

After presenting the facts as they know them, parents or caregivers can ask their teen for their response to the information. They should listen to the youth and hear what they say. Parents or caregivers should try to determine if the problem is beyond their ability to help and therefore need to bring in a professional.

Discuss

The next step is to discuss the shared information. This may be the most difficult part, as the tendency for the parents or caregivers and the teen is to respond angrily to each other. Parents or caregivers should not accept flimsy excuses; rather, they should be steady and consistent in their approach and avoid "looking the other way" because it's easier. Parents or caregivers should take comfort in knowing they are doing the right thing.

- Parents or caregivers who want to talk with their teen about drugs should plan for the conversation.
- When talking with an adolescent, parents or caregivers should begin the conversation by expressing their love and concern for the youth and then present the facts as they know them.
- Parents or caregivers should be steady and consistent in their approach with the teen and avoid "looking the other way" because it's easier.
- Talking with adolescents about drugs is a continuous process— not an event. Parents or caregivers should tell their teen that they will have other meetings to "check in."



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Make It Safe

The teen may become defensive during this crucial conversation—not because of *what* the parents or caregivers are saying, but because of *why the youth thinks* they are saying it. To create safety, parents or caregivers can:

- **State what they don't intend and what they do intend:** “I want to reassure you that I have no desire to make your decisions for you or to cut you off from having a happy life. I want to be supportive of you, and I want to influence choices you might make that I believe will hurt you.”
- **Be flexible about *when* they talk but not *whether* they talk:** It's best to try to engage the teen in dialogue by respecting their preference about when to talk.

Set Rules

Parents or caregivers should firmly and warmly make it very clear that they will not tolerate drug use by their teen, and they should identify for the youth the consequences if they use substances. Some parents or caregivers find it hard to set clear rules. For these parents or caregivers, it might help if they commiserate with their adolescent. For example, “I know it's difficult that I have to make these rules. But I wouldn't be a good parent to you if I didn't take care of your safety and make them.”

Some parents or caregivers find it hard to remember to be caring while making clear rules. These parents or caregivers may want to begin by recalling with their teen a time in the past when the youth followed a rule with good results. For example, “Remember the rule we have about doing your homework before any other activity? And look how well that worked out because you did so well in school.”

Set Clear Consequences—Reward Good Behavior

Parents or caregivers should let their adolescent know that they will be holding them accountable for their actions—and that there will be consequences for not following the rules such as loss of privileges or restricting their curfew. Parents or caregivers may consider offering incentives or rewards. They can also “catch them” when their teen is doing something right.

Road Blocks

Parents or caregivers should not be surprised if their teen gets up and walks away in anger. They should let everyone cool down and prepare to have the conversation again. Some ways the youth may try to deflect the conversation are by saying,

- “Why are you making this such a big deal. Everyone does it.”
- “That's not my stash. I was just holding it for a friend.”
- “I only used once. I don't hang out with those kids anymore.”

No matter what the teen says, parents or caregivers can calmly remind the youth that nothing excuses them from using drugs.

Continue The Conversation

Talking with adolescents about drugs is a continuous process—not an event. Parents or caregivers can let their teen know that they would like to have another “meeting” to check in. However, if they find that they are having the same conversation over and over and their message isn't being heard, they may want to seek assistance from a healthcare professional.

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental
Health and Addiction Services

www.ct.gov/DMHAS

24/7 Access Line

1.800.563.4086

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration

www.SAMHSA.gov

Partnership to End Addiction

www.drugfree.org

Text 55753 for support