



## Drug Prevention Tips for Every Age

Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids. But, when tackling some of life’s tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. We’ve provided scenarios and scripts below on what to say to your child, no matter their age.

### **Helpful to Note:**

Always keep conversations open and honest.

Come from a place of love, even when you’re having tough conversations.

Balance positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement.

Keep in mind that teachable moments come up all the time — be mindful of natural places for the conversation to go in order to broach the topic of drugs and alcohol.

### **What to Say to Your Preschooler About Drugs (2-4 years old)**

Since the foundation for all healthy habits — from nutrition to toothbrushing— is laid down during the preschool years, this is a great time to set the stage for a drug-free life. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your 2- to 4-year-old child:

#### **SCENARIO**

Giving your child a daily vitamin

#### **WHAT TO SAY**

Vitamins help your body grow. You need to take them every day so that you’ll grow up big and strong like Mommy and Daddy—but you should only take what I give you. Too many vitamins can hurt you and make you sick.

#### **SCENARIO**

Your kids are curious about medicine bottles around the house

#### **WHAT TO SAY**

You should only take medicines that have your name on them or that your doctor has chosen just for you. If you take medicine that belongs to somebody else, it could be dangerous and make you sick.

#### **SCENARIO**

Your child sees an adult smoking and, since you’ve talked about the dangers of smoking, is confused.

#### **WHAT TO SAY**

Grownups can make their own decisions and sometimes those decisions aren’t the best for their bodies. Sometimes, when someone starts smoking, his or her body feels like it has to have cigarettes—even though it’s not healthy. And that makes it harder for him or her to quit.

### **Tips for Conversations with Your Preschooler**

Explain the importance of taking good care of our bodies – eating right, exercising and getting a good night’s sleep. Discuss how good you feel when you take care of yourself — how you can run, jump, play and work for many hours.

Celebrate your child’s decision-making skills. Whenever possible, let your child choose what to wear. Even if the clothes don’t quite match, you are reinforcing your child’s ability to make decisions. Turn chores like brushing teeth, putting away toys, wiping up spills, and caring for pets into fun experiences that your child will enjoy. Break the activities down into manageable steps so that your child learns to develop plans.

Help your child steer clear of dangerous substances that exist in her immediate world. Point out poisonous and harmful chemicals commonly found in homes, such as bleach, kitchen cleansers and furniture polish. Explain that she should only eat or smell food, or take medicine from a doctor or from you, a relative or other known caregiver. Also, explain that drugs from the doctor help the person the doctor gives them to but that they can harm someone else.

Help your child understand the difference between make-believe and real life. Ask your child what he thinks about a TV program or story. Let your child know about your likes and dislikes. Discuss how violence or bad decisions can hurt people.

Turn frustration into a learning opportunity. If a tower of blocks keeps collapsing during a play session, work with your child to find possible solutions to the problem.

### **What to Say to Your Early Elementary School Aged Child About Drugs (5-8 years old)**

5- to-8-year-olds are still tied to family and eager to please, but they’re also beginning to explore their individuality. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your 5- to 8-year-old child:

#### **SCENARIO**

Your child has expressed curiosity about the pills she sees you take every day — and the other bottles in the medicine cabinet

#### **WHAT TO SAY**

Just because it’s in a family’s medicine cabinet doesn’t mean that it is safe for you to take. Even if your friends say it’s okay, say, “No, my parents won’t let me take something that doesn’t have my name on the bottle.”

#### **SCENARIO**

Your child dresses herself for school in a pink zebra print tank top, a polka dot vest, striped leggings and an orange beret.

#### **WHAT TO SAY**

“You look great. I love how you express your personality in your outfits.” Celebrate your child’s decision-making skills. Whenever possible, let your child choose what to wear. Even if the clothes don’t quite match, you are reinforcing your child’s ability to make decisions for herself.

### **Tips for Conversations with Your Early Elementary School Child**

Talk to your kids about the drug-related messages they receive through advertisements, the news media and entertainment sources. Ask your kids how they feel about the things they've heard — you'll learn a great deal about what they're thinking.

Keep your discussions about substances focused on the present — long-term consequences are too distant to have any meaning. Talk about the differences between the medicinal uses and illegal uses of drugs, and how drugs can negatively impact the families and friends of people who use them. Set clear rules and explain the reasons for your rules. If you use tobacco or alcohol, be mindful of the message you are sending to your children.

Work on problem solving: Help them find long-lasting solutions to homework trouble, a fight with a friend, or in dealing with a bully. Be sure to point out that quick fixes are not long-term solutions.

Give your kids the power to escape from situations that make them feel bad. Make sure they know that they shouldn't stay in a place that makes them feel uncomfortable or bad about themselves. Also let them know that they don't need to stick with friends who don't support them.

Get to know your child's friends — and their friends' parents. Check in occasionally to make sure they are giving their children the same kinds of messages you give your children.

### **What to Say to Your Preteen About Drugs (9-12 years old)**

Preteens, on their quest to figure out their place in the world, tend to give their friends' opinions a great deal of power, while at the same time starting to question their parents' views and messages. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your 9- to 12-year-old:

#### **SCENARIO**

Your child is just starting middle school and you know that eventually, he will be offered drugs and alcohol.

#### **WHAT TO SAY**

I know we talked about drinking and drugs when you were younger, but now is when they're probably going to be an issue. I'm guessing you'll at least hear about kids who are experimenting. I just want you to remember that I'm here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the stuff you hear or see. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?"

#### **SCENARIO**

You find out that kids are selling prescription drugs at your child's school. Your child hasn't mentioned it and you want to get the conversation about it started.

#### **WHAT TO SAY**

Hey, you probably know that parents talk to each other and find things out about what's going on at school. I heard there are kids selling pills – prescriptions that either they are taking or someone in their family takes. Have you heard about kids doing this?" Let him know that in the future, he can always blame you to get out of a bad situation. Say, "If you're ever offered drugs at school, tell that person, "My mother would kill me if I took that and then she wouldn't let me play baseball."

## **SCENARIO**

Your child's favorite celebrity—the one he or she really looks up to—has been named in a drug scandal

## **WHAT TO SAY**

Being in the public eye puts a ton of pressure on people, and many turn to drugs because they think drugs will relieve that stress. The thing is, when a person uses drugs and alcohol—especially a young person because he's still growing—it changes how his brain works and makes him do really stupid things. Most people who use drugs and alcohol need a lot of help to get better. I hope the celebrity has a good doctor and friends and family members to help him/her.

### **Tips for Conversations with Your Preteen**

Make sure your child knows your rules — and that you'll enforce the consequences if rules are broken. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.

Kids who don't know what to say when someone offers them drugs are more likely to give in to peer pressure. Let her know that she can always use you as an excuse and say: "No, my mom [or dad, aunt, etc.] will kill me if I smoke a cigarette."

Feelings of insecurity, doubt and pressure may creep in during puberty. Offset those feelings with a lot of positive comments about who he is as an individual — and not just when he brings home an A. Preteens aren't concerned with future problems that might result from experimentation with tobacco, alcohol or other drugs, but they are concerned about their appearance — sometimes to the point of obsession. Tell them about the smelly hair and ashtray breath caused by cigarettes.

Get to know your child's friends — and their friends' parents. Check in by phone or a visit occasionally to make sure they are on the same page with prohibiting drug or alcohol use, particularly when their home is to be used for a party or sleepover.

Help children separate reality from fantasy. Watch TV and movies with them and ask lots of questions to reinforce the distinction between the two. Remember to include advertising in your discussions, as those messages are especially powerful.

## **What to Say to Your Teenager About Drugs (13-18 years old)**

This is a pivotal time for parents in helping kids make positive choices when faced with drugs and alcohol. Teens are a savvy bunch when it comes to this topic, and they need detailed and reality-driven messages from you. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your high school aged child:

## **SCENARIO**

Your teen is starting high school — and you want to remind him that he doesn't have to give in to peer pressure to drink or use drugs.

## **WHAT TO SAY**

High school is going to be a ton of fun, and we want you to have a great time. But we also know there's going to be some pressure to start drinking, abusing medicine, smoking pot or taking other drugs. A lot of people feel like this is just what high school kids do. But it's actually not. Many high schoolers don't drink or use drugs, which means it won't make you weird to choose not to drink or use drugs, either.

You can still have a lot of fun if you don't drink or use drugs. It is important to seek out these other kids who are making good choices and be brave about trying new activities or making new friends.

You'll have a lot of decisions to make about what you want to do in high school and you might even make some mistakes. Just know that you can talk to us about anything, anytime — even if you DO make a mistake or feel stuck in a situation that you need help to get out of. We won't freak out. We'll figure out a way to help you. We want you to count on us to help you make smart decisions and stay safe, okay?

### **SCENARIO**

Your teen has started to hang out with kids you don't know — and dropped his old friends.

### **WHAT TO SAY**

It seems like you are hanging with a different crowd than you have in the past. Is something going on with your usual friends? Is there a problem with your old friends, or are you just branching out and meeting some new kids? Tell me about your new friends. What are they like? What do they like to do? What do you like about them?

### **SCENARIO**

Your high schooler comes home smelling of alcohol or cigarette smoke for the first time.

### **WHAT TO SAY**

The response should be measured, quiet and serious — not yelling, shouting or overly emotional. Your child should realize that this isn't just a small frustrating moment like when he doesn't do a chore you asked for; it's a very serious moment.

Say, "I'm really upset that you're smoking/drinking. I need to get a handle on how often this has been happening and what your experiences have been so far. I get that you're worried about being in trouble, but the worst part of that moment is over — I know that you're experimenting. I love you and care about you. Your health and well-being are very important to me. Let's talk about this. I need you to be honest with me. So, for starters, tell me about what happened tonight."

### **Tips for Conversations with Your Teenager**

Make sure your teen knows your rules and the consequences for breaking those rules — and, most importantly, that you really will enforce those consequences if the rules are broken. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules. Kids who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use drugs.

Make it clear that you disapprove of all alcohol, tobacco and drug use. As teens are extremely concerned with their physical appearance, remind your teen about the negative effects alcohol, tobacco and other drugs have on physical appearance.

Let your teen in on all the things you find wonderful about him. He needs to hear a lot of positive comments about his life and who he is as an individual — and not just when he makes the basketball team or does well on a test. Positive reinforcement can go a long way in preventing drug use among teens.

Show interest in and discuss your child's daily ups and downs. You'll earn your child's trust, learn how to talk to each other, and won't take your child by surprise when you voice a strong point of view about drugs.

Don't just leave your child's anti-drug education up to her school. Ask your teen what she's learned about drugs in school and then build on that with additional topics, such as how and why chemical dependence occurs; the unpredictable nature of dependency and how it varies from person to person; the impact of drug use on maintaining a healthy lifestyle; or positive approaches to stress reduction. Encourage your teen to volunteer somewhere that he can see the impact of drugs on your community. Teenagers tend to be idealistic and enjoy hearing about ways they can help make an impact. Help your teen research volunteer opportunities at local homeless shelters, hospitals or victim services centers.

### **What to Say to Your Young Adult About Drugs (19-25-years old)**

As you prepare your child for life after high school, you can help guide her to a healthy experience — while still supporting her independence. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your 19-25-year-old:

#### **SCENARIO**

Your adult child is moving to her own apartment or into a college dorm

#### **WHAT TO SAY**

I know you're off to start your own life but please know that I'm always here for you. I respect that you're old enough to make your own choices, but if you ever want another perspective on things, give a shout. I'll try my hardest to help you out without judging you for your decisions. Sound good? There are certain things that you can count on in life and one of the things you're going to be able to count on is me.

#### **SCENARIO**

After watching a movie portraying drug use together, you want to gauge your adult child's opinion on drugs.

#### **WHAT TO SAY**

I know you're going to think that I'm over-protective or meddling, and I'm sorry. But that movie really disturbed me and I'm curious: Is there a lot of drug use at your college/in your new town? Do the new friends that you've made dabble in drugs at all? How do you feel about it?

### **Tips for Conversations with Your Young Adult**

Make sure you keep an open line of communication with your child as she leaves home. It doesn't all have to be about the topic of drinking and drug use, either — it's about maintaining a really supportive relationship. Your child needs to know that if any problems or difficult situations arise, she can turn to you for help. Be an at-home resource for your college student.

Stay alert to possible mental health issues. There is a strong link between mental and physical health issues (including stress) and the use of drugs and alcohol. Just in case something does happen, make sure you know what campus mental health resources are available to your child — and make sure they know, too.

While the most popular drugs on college campuses are alcohol and marijuana, non-medical use of prescription stimulants, analgesics (painkillers), and tranquilizers is on the rise. Though prescription drugs do have an important role when prescribed by a doctor, unsupervised use of them can be extremely harmful.

Source: Partnership for Drug-Free Kids