

HOW TO: *Talk to your kids about drugs & Alcohol*

THE **safe** FOUNDATION



Start the conversation

Children are influenced by their parents significantly when it comes to experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Adolescence is an important time for laying the foundations of good health, and one of the most influential factors is maintaining a strong open relationship with a parent.

There is no question that your kids will be exposed to and learn about drugs and alcohol, so its best to hear it from YOU.

When we start talking to them in their early adolescent years, we can protect our kids from many high risk behaviors associated with the use of drugs and alcohol. When we don't address the risk of underage drinking and substance use our kids may think there is no harm in trying it.

Having those uncomfortable conversations allows us to set clear rules and expectations on the use of drugs and alcohol.

How do I have that initial talk with my child on substance abuse?

*Create a supportive and nurturing environment where your child feels comfortable talking to you or asking questions he/she may have.

*You want to avoid getting into lecturing mode and statistics.

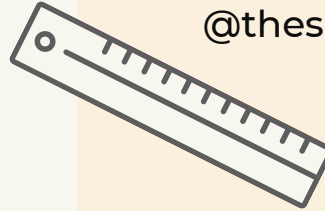
*Ask questions that can't be answered with just a single word. Yes and no answers don't lead to meaningful conversation.



Reminders

Scare tactics don't work. Your kids will hear you, but immediately discount it based on their personal experiences.

Keep all questions open ended. They invite a lengthier response.



For More Information

Email

liat@thesafefoundation.org

Follow us on Instagram

[@thesafefoundation](https://www.instagram.com/thesafefoundation)

Here are some samples questions and tips that will invite for conversations!

When you are in a situation where there are opportunities for drug and alcohol use? Do you feel pressure? Why or why not?

This is a good time to set up an agreement between you and your child and let them know they can call you anytime when they are faced with these situations, no questions asked (for the time being). Talk to them about thinking ahead and anticipating possible outcomes and what they can do to avoid these kinds of situations in the first place.

Why do you think some teens abuse drugs & alcohol?

Some answers to expect "because it's fun", "feels cool", "curious", "stressed or anxious" Explore that with "what else can you do for fun or to feel cool?" or "what else can you do when you feel stressed, anxious, depressed?"



Imagine you had a teenager or a younger sibling, what would you say to them about drinking and drugs?

You will get a range of answers but it will provoke an interesting discussion. Ask them to consider the choices they would want this person to make when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Are they different from the choices they are making themselves or intend to make?

When you feel stressed, anxious, lonely, bored, what do you do to feel better? Sometimes, people “self medicate” with drugs and alcohol to avoid these different feelings. What are some healthier options?

Your children should be able to come up with a list. Have them write this down or put the list on their phones as a point of reference.

When do you think people are old enough to make their decisions about drinking or drugs?

Your kids will most likely say at the age of 21 when it's legal. Ask them if there are other reasons and why it's a good idea for teens to wait until they are 21. Have a conversation around that and discuss the dangers of underage substance use. You can offer that research shows that teens who use alcohol and drugs regularly are 68% more likely to become addicted than those who hold off use until the age of 21 where the chances drop to 2%.

Name a few things you would like to accomplish by the time you graduate High School. How can using drugs or alcohol get in the way of those goals?

Encourage your children to see that the temporary fun of drinking and drugs can come with dangerous risks. Underage drugs and alcohol use can result in academic failure, poor studying habits, focusing and lack of motivation.

Here are some sample questions kids may ask, and suggested ways to respond.

Why do some people become addicted, while others don't?

Great question, and a hard one. We don't fully understand yet why this is so.

Some findings point to:

- Genetics
- Environment



What properties in drugs make them addicting?

Different drugs act on the brain in different ways, but they all cause release of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the brain's reward area, which is what causes the pleasurable sensation (the high). Once a person uses a drug repeatedly, their brain starts to adjust to these surges of dopamine; the brain cells (neurons) make fewer dopamine receptors, or they simply produce less dopamine.

Make sure your child understands addiction. Emphasize that some things are **very difficult to quit** using after they start the habit. Some people are not able to stop at all, which leads to tragedy. Even if someone successfully stops using an addictive substance, there may be permanent damage to their brain or body from long term use. Plus, relapse is all too common.

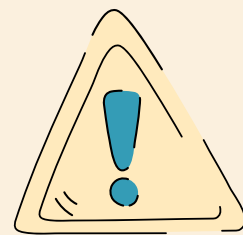
How can I help someone if they are on drugs?

One of the best things you can do for a friend with a serious drug problem is let them know **you are there to support them**.

Tell them you're concerned about their drug use and encourage them to **seek help from a trusted adult**; maybe a teacher, coach, parent, or counselor can help.

You can also help by being a **strong positive influence**; help them get involved in non-drug-using activities like joining a club, playing music, or playing a sport. However, if your friend is becoming a negative influence in your life, you might have to step away from the friendship for a while.

If you feel your friend is a danger to himself or herself, or to others, it is important to **tell a trusted adult right away**; it could save your friend's life.



Why is alcohol bad for me?

Don't try to scare your child about drinking or tell him or her, "You can't handle it."

Instead, tell your child that alcohol can be **bad for his or her growing brain, interferes with judgment**, and can make him or her **sick**. Underage drinking has severe consequences, including injury or death from accidents; unintended, unwanted, or unprotected sexual activity; academic problems; and drug use.

Young people who drink are also more likely to have health issues such as **depression and anxiety disorders**. Once children hear the facts and your opinions about them, it is easier for you to make rules and enforce them.

What can cause a hangover?

There are several reasons why people experience hangovers from drinking.

Dehydration - Alcohol causes the body to get rid of too much fluid, and the dehydration that results can cause headaches, nausea, thirst, and other symptoms of hangovers.

While some people think that alcohol helps a person sleep, it actually **disrupts sleep**, and that can contribute to the grogginess that accompanies hangovers.



Did you drink when you were a kid?

Don't let your past stop you from talking to your child about underage drinking. If you drank as a teenager, **be honest**.

Acknowledge that it was risky. Make sure to emphasize that we now know even more about the risks to children who drink underage. Consider telling your children relatable stories about making smart decisions when it comes to alcohol. These could be stories that show the consequences of engaging in risky behavior.

You drink alcohol, so why can't I?

Remind your child that underage drinking is **against the law and for good reason**. Point out that adults are fully developed mentally and physically, so they can handle drinking. Children's minds and bodies, however, are still growing, so alcohol can have a greater effect on their judgment and health.

What if my friends ask me to drink?



Helping your child say “no” to peer pressure is one of the most important things you can do to keep him or her alcohol-free. Work with your child to think of a way to handle this situation, whether it is simply saying, “No, I don’t drink,” or “I have a game tomorrow,” or “I have to go to work tomorrow.”

Let your child know they can come to you even when they feel they may have done something that will upset you. Their safety is your number one priority.



Is vaping bad for you even if it’s just flavoring?

It can be.

Research shows that many teens and young adults don’t realize that the flavors they use actually can contain **nicotine, an addictive compound found in tobacco.**

Many vapes also contain propylene glycol, glycerin, chemical flavorings, and other compounds with unknown health effects. As a result, people who vape—even just flavoring—may inhale and ingest potentially **harmful chemicals.**

Other vaping products can also cause harm. In 2020, thousands of people got sick and dozens died from an illness called EVALI, which stands for e-cigarette or vaping-use associated lung injury. Vitamin E acetate, an additive in some THC-containing vaping products, is strongly linked to EVALI. When heated and inhaled, vitamin E acetate can damage the lung.

Lead by Example

You're of age, so it's ok to drink in front of your kids. But, be mindful of the messages you are sending them.

- Do you drink after a hard day at work?
- Do you drink due to stress?
- Do you drink to feel more comfortable in social situations?

If so, you may be giving your child a message about alcohol without even realizing it.