

Drug & Alcohol Talking Tips for Parents

1. Start Out with the Positive Instead of the Negative

Focus on your child's positive attributes, share examples of when they demonstrated good judgment in making a decision and emphasize how much faith you have in them to continue to make wise decisions when it comes to drugs and alcohol. You can say something like, "I hope that your good decision making skills won't be compromised when it comes to making the choice of not drinking, or taking other unhealthy risks."

2. Create a Game Plan Together with your Child

Create a space where you can share your expectations for your child and they in turn can share with you expectations they have for themselves. This is key to ensuring that they make safe and appropriate decisions when it comes to drugs and alcohol. You can pro-actively role play situations that could occur when they are out with their friends on the weekend. Be clear and transparent with your expectations and concerns for them. Be sure they can identify your values and your rules.

3. Reality Check

Ask them what they will do if they find themselves in a situation that is not comfortable or where there will be alcohol served. If they shrug you off, let them know that in order for you to feel ok about them going out, you need them to discuss their plan even if it seems silly. The child who is able to articulate their plan for handling a potentially unsafe situation is more likely to make a good judgment call and will ultimately be more accountable for their actions.

4. Establish an Ongoing Conversation

When speaking with your child about drugs and alcohol, it is imperative to make this an ongoing conversation versus a 'one-time' talk. Use teachable moments when watching TV together and bring up the topic naturally and casually. This technique will enable your child to feel more comfortable coming to you with questions or concerns.

5. Protect your Child but Refrain from Enabling Them

As parents, we can only do so much and it's important to sometimes sit back and feel confident that you've instilled values in your child to help them discern responsible versus irresponsible choices. Although your child should know you are there for them in an emergency situation when they need someone to help them, they also need to know that they are responsible and accountable for their actions.

6. Spend Time Together, and Make Family Time a Priority

The single-most identifiable protective factor for 'tween' and teen risk-taking behavior is family time; time with immediate family, extended family all supports and strengthens self worth and sense of belonging, while simultaneously reducing risk for negative outcomes. Be sure your kids know it is of value to you to spend time with them!