



TIPS FOR EVERY AGE

STARTING CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CHILD



Operation**Aware**
Educate. Prevent. Empower.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR PRESCHOOLER

2-4 YEARS OLD

EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING GOOD CARE OF OUR BODIES.

- Encourage 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 INTO FUN EXPERIENCES.

- Break activities down into manageable steps so that your child learns to develop plans. Ex: brushing teeth, putting away toys, wiping up spills, or caring for pets.

HELP YOUR CHILD STEER CLEAR OF DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES THAT EXIST IN YOUR IMMEDIATE WORLD.

- Point out poisonous and harmful chemicals commonly found in homes, such as bleach, kitchen cleansers, and furniture polish.
- Explain that your child should only eat or smell food and only take medicine from a doctor that you or other know caregiver give to them.
- Explain that drugs from a doctor help the person the doctor gives them to but 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.

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR PRESCHOOLER ABOUT DRUGS

2-4 YEARS OLD

Since the foundation for all healthy habits – from nutrition to hygiene – is established during the preschool years, this is a great time to set the stage for a drug-free life. The following scripts will help you start conversations with your 2- to 4-year-old.



YOU ARE GIVING YOUR CHILD A DAILY VITAMIN

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

YOUR CHILD IS CURIOUS ABOUT MEDICINE BOTTLES AROUND THE HOUSE

– 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.

YOUR CHILD SEES AN ADULT SMOKING, AND SINCE YOU'VE TALKED ABOUT THE DANGERS OF SMOKING, IS CONFUSED

– 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 TALKING WITH YOUR ELEMENTARY STUDENT

5-8 YEARS OLD

DISCUSS THE DRUG-RELATED MESSAGES THEY RECEIVE THROUGH ADVERTISEMENTS, NEWS MEDIA, AND ENTERTAINMENT SOURCES.

- Ask your kid how they feel about the things they've heard – you'll learn a great deal about what they're thinking.

KEEP DISCUSSIONS ABOUT SUBSTANCES AND RELATED RISKS FOCUSED ON THE PRESENT.

- Long-term consequences are too distant to have any meaning.
- Talk about the differences between the medicinal and illegal drug use.
- Discuss how drugs can negatively impact the families and friends of people who use them.

SET CLEAR RULES AND EXPLAIN YOUR REASONS.

- If you use alcohol or nicotine, be mindful of the message you are sending to your children.

WORK ON PROBLEM SOLVING.

- Help your child 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 unsafe, uncomfortable, or bad about themselves.
- Let them know that they don't need to stick with friends who don't support them.

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR ELEMENTARY STUDENT ABOUT DRUGS

5-8 YEARS OLD

Children aged five to eight are still tied to family and eager to please, but they're beginning to explore their individuality. The following scripts will help you start conversations with your 5- to 8-year-old.



YOUR CHILD HAS EXPRESSED CURIOSITY ABOUT THE PILLS SHE SEES YOU TAKE EVERY DAY AND OTHER BOTTLES IN THE MEDICINE CABINET.

– Just because it's in a family medicine cabinet doesn't mean it's 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.'

YOUR CHILD DRESSES HERSELF FOR SCHOOL IN A PINK ZEBRA PRINT TANK TOP, POLKA DOT LEGGINGS, AND AN ORANGE BERET.

– 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.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR PRETEEN

9-12 YEARS OLD

MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD KNOWS YOUR RULES – AND THAT YOU'LL ENFORCE THE CONSEQUENCES IF YOUR RULES ARE BROKEN.

- Research shows that children are less likely to use nicotine, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences.

PRACTICE REFUSAL SKILLS FOR PEER PRESSURE SITUATIONS.

- Children who don't know what to say when someone offers them drugs are more likely to give in to peer pressure.
- Let your child know that he can always use you as an excuse to say no.

OFFSET NEGATIVE FEELINGS WITH POSITIVE COMMENTS.

- Feelings of insecurity and doubt may creep in during puberty.
- Share positive comments often about who your child is as an individual – and not just when she brings home an A grade.

EDUCATE THEM ON THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF DRUGS ON PHYSICAL APPEARANCE.

- Preteens aren't concerned with future problems that might result from experimentation with nicotine, alcohol, or other drugs, but they are concerned about their appearance – sometimes to the point of obsession.
- Remind them of the negative effects alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs can have on physical appearance.

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD'S FRIENDS – AND THEIR PARENTS.

- Check in by phone or visit once in awhile 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.

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR PRETEEN ABOUT DRUGS

9-12 YEARS OLD

Preteens tend to give their friends' opinions a great deal of power, while at the same time starting to question their parent's views and messages. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your 9- to 12-year-old.



YOUR CHILD IS JUST STARTING MIDDLE SCHOOL AND YOU KNOW THAT EVENTUALLY HE WILL BE OFFERED DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

– 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 see or hear. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?

YOUR CHILD'S FAVORITE CELEBRITY HAS BEEN NAMED IN A DRUG SCANDAL

– 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 who is still growing – it changes how their brain works and makes them do really stupid things. Most people who struggle with drug and alcohol abuse need a lot of help to get better. I hope [the celebrity] has a good doctor, friends, and family to help him.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR TEENAGER

13-18 YEARS OLD

MAKE SURE YOUR TEEN KNOWS YOUR RULES AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR BREAKING THOSE RULES.

- Most importantly, make it known that you really will enforce the consequences if the rules are broken.
- Research shows that children are less likely to use nicotine, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences. Children who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use drugs.

MAKE IT CLEAR THAT YOU DISAPPROVE OF ALCOHOL, NICOTINE, AND DRUG USE.

- As teens are extremely concerned with their physical appearance, remind your teen about the negative effects alcohol, nicotine, and other drugs can have on physical appearance.

TELL YOUR TEEN ALL THE THINGS YOU LOVE ABOUT HIM.

- Your teen 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 LIFE.

- 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 on drugs.

DON'T LEAVE YOUR CHILD'S ANTI-DRUG EDUCATION UP TO THEIR SCHOOL.

- Ask your teen what she's learned about drugs in school and then build on that with additional topics.

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, and they need detailed and reality-driven messages. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your teenager.



YOUR TEEN HAS DROPPED HIS OLD FRIENDS AND STARTED TO HANG OUT WITH KIDS YOU DON'T KNOW

- It seems like you are hanging with a different crowd than you have in the past. Is something going on with your usual 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?

YOUR TEEN COMES HOME SMELLING OF ALCOHOL OR CIGARETTE SMOKE FOR THE FIRST TIME

Your response should be measured, quiet, and serious – not yelling or overly emotional. Your child should realize that this isn't just a small frustrating moment.

- I'm really upset that you're smoking/drinking. I need to get an idea of 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 the 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, so I need you to be honest with me. For starters, tell me what happened tonight.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR YOUNG ADULT

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 script will help you get conversations going with your young adult.

YOUR ADULT CHILD IS MOVING INTO HER OWN APARTMENT OR COLLEGE DORM

– 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 me a shout. I'll try my hardest to help you without judging you for your decisions. Sound good?

KEEP AN OPEN LINE OF COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CHILD AS SHE LEAVES HOME.

- It doesn't have to be about drinking or drug use either. It's about maintaining a 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 young adult.

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 resources are available to your child, and make sure they know too.

BE AWARE OF NON-MEDICAL PRESCRIPTION DRUG USE.

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

PARENTING IS TOUGH



Parenting presents many challenges at every stage,
but there are resources available.

Learn more about Operation Aware and the
prevention education programs being provided to
Tulsa-area youth.

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www.operationaware.org
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