

Parents' Guide to Talking with Kids about Drugs

Strong Voices.
Smart Choices.

Talk with kids about drugs.

COALITION
FOR A SAFE AND
DRUG-FREE
FAIRFIELD

Working Neighborhood by Neighborhood to Build Drug-Free Communities

The Coalition addresses alcohol, tobacco and other drug issues in the 10-county region of Southwest Ohio, Northern Kentucky and Southeastern Indiana. The Coalition does this, in part, by helping to establish local community coalitions.

Butler County Drug-Free
Schools Consortium

The Caring Place: Joining Our
Youth (JOY)

Champions for a Drug-Free
Northern Kentucky

Citizens Against Substance
Abuse

Clermont County Safe
Communities

Coalition for a Drug-Free
Fairfield

Coalition for a Drug-Free Lower
Price Hill

Coalition for a Drug-Free
Greater Warren County

Coalition for a Healthy
Community-Oxford

Coalition for a Safe & Drug-Free
Southern Brown County

University of Cincinnati
Commission on Alcohol &
Other Drug Education

Covington Partners in
Prevention

The Crossroads Center

Price Hill Will

Hamilton County Safe
Communities

Hamilton County Tobacco
Partnership

Hope, Inc.

Lincoln Heights-Lockland Weed
& Seed

Madeira Community Drug Task
Force

Madisonville Weed & Seed

Mason Coalition for a Drug &
Alcohol-Free Youth

Northeast Community
Challenge

North End Weed & Seed

Northern Kentucky Juvenile
Delinquency Prevention
Council

SAGA-Substance Abuse
Greater Anderson

Stayin' Alive Franklin County,
LCC

Tobacco Prevention Coalition of
Northern Kentucky

Winton Woods Community
Coalition

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

On behalf of the Coalition for a Drug-Free Greater Cincinnati's Board of Trustees, staff and volunteers, thank you for your concern and commitment to raising healthy and drug-free children.

It is our vision that every child in our community will grow up in a purposefully drug-free environment. Coalitions depend on the support of the community, and, in our case, depend very much upon the greatest influencers in children's lives—their parents and other caring adults.

The Coalition's biannual Student Drug Use Survey of tens-of-thousands of tri-state seventh through twelfth graders has told us that parents who talk to their kids about alcohol and other drugs as well as set and enforce rules around these substances contribute significantly to a child's decision to be drug-free.

We know that starting these conversations can be difficult and uncomfortable for parents and other adults who care for and about children. This booklet, "Parents' Guide to Talking with Kids about Drugs," gives you tips on how to talk to children at every stage of development—from preschool through young adulthood. Strong voices help children make smart choices about alcohol and drugs.

Again, thank you for your commitment to help tri-state kids be healthy and drug-free. For more information, please visit our Web site at www.DrugFreeCincinnati.org.

Sincerely,



*Holly J. James, MPA
Coalition President and Executive Director*

PARENTS AND OTHER CONCERNED ADULTS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE:

“Upsetting or disappointing my parents” is the main reason kids give for why they won’t use drugs. So start talking and keep the lines of communication open on this important issue.

Follow these steps . . .

1. Establish and maintain good communication with your child.
2. Get involved in your child’s life.
3. Make clear rules and enforce them with consistency and appropriate consequences.
4. Be a positive role model.
5. Teach your child to choose friends wisely.
6. Monitor your child’s activities.

-United States Department of Health and Human Services
SAMHSA’s *Keeping Youth Drug-Free*

Among 7th through 12th graders in our region, those who report that their parents would disapprove if they used alcohol, tobacco or other drugs are less likely to use them on a regular basis.

-CDFGC Student Drug Use Survey

Talking with Preschoolers & Kindergarteners:

It may seem too early to talk about drugs with preschoolers, but the attitudes and habits that they form at this age will shape the decisions they will make when they're older.

- Tell your children you love them and give them encouragement every day.
- Discuss why children need healthy food and explain the importance of making good decisions about what should and should not go into their bodies.
- Explain how medicines prescribed by a doctor for illness are drugs that can help the person get better, but can be harmful if misused.

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PARENTING TIP #1

Point out poisonous and harmful household substances and explain why children should only put good things into their bodies.



First through Third grades: (6-8 years old)

Young people are exposed to alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs early on—even in elementary school. As your child shows increasing interest in the world outside the family and home, now is the time to start talking about these issues. Explain that some people use them even though they are harmful; talk about the consequences of using them.

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Among 7th through 12th graders in our region, those who view alcohol, tobacco and other drugs as harmful are less likely to use them on a regular basis.

-CDFGC Student Drug Use Survey

PRIMARY ISSUE: At this age, it is essential to help kids understand what is harmful versus what is helpful. Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are harmful when taken in a way that prevents the body’s ability to be healthy.

- Establish the ground rules for your family and make sure your child understands them: “It is never okay for kids in our family to use illegal drugs or to drink alcohol.”
- Explain why adults may drink alcohol, but children may not: “It’s illegal for children and harms a child’s ability to learn and develop important social skills.”
- Explain the idea of addiction—that drug use can become very difficult to stop.
- Introduce concepts of legality and danger: “People who use marijuana and cocaine can go to jail. People who use inhalants can die.”

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PARENTING TIP #2

Be a good role model and set a good example. Do not make drinking a focus of social gatherings when kids are present. It’s never okay to ask your child to get you a beer or other alcoholic beverage.



Fourth through Sixth grades: (9-11 years old)

Research shows that the earlier children begin using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, the more likely they are to experience serious problems. As a parent, you need to keep alcohol, tobacco and other drugs away from your children as long as you can. It is important that your child's anti-drug attitudes are strong before entering middle school or junior high.

Children who begin drinking before the age of 15 are five-times more likely to develop alcohol problems than those who start after age 21.

-The NSDUH Report, 10/22/04

PRIMARY ISSUE: At this age, it is important to nurture your relationship with your child as he or she grows and changes.

- Talk with your children about why they think young people might use. Talk to them about why it's not a good choice no matter what reason, and tell them you expect them not to use.
- Keep communication lines open in all areas, even if it is difficult or embarrassing.
- Listen to what your children are saying and experiencing. At this age, children begin to experience different pressures with school and friends.
- Brainstorm with your children about the consequences of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Ask them: "What can happen to kids if they use drugs?"
- Set ground rules. Pay attention to where they are and with whom they spend time. Establish relationships with the parents of your child's friends.
- Establish daily family rituals for connecting with your children that will continue throughout adolescence.

dinner table

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PARENTING TIP #3

Open your house as a safe and drug-free gathering place for young people. Get to know your child's friends and their parents.



Seventh through Ninth grades: (12-14 years old)

Although teens often seem unreceptive to their parents as they struggle to become independent, teens want and need parental support, involvement and guidance more than ever. Adolescence is often a confusing and stressful time, characterized by mood changes and deep insecurity. It's not surprising then, that this is the time when many young people try alcohol, tobacco and other drugs for the first time.

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PARENTING TIP #4

At this pivotal time, parents must monitor children closely, set clear rules, step in early if you suspect use and enforce consequences when rules are broken.



PRIMARY ISSUE: This is a difficult time for adolescents. Listen and support your child. Continue to stay actively involved in your child's life.

- During this time, your children will likely encounter situations where they will need to make decisions regarding alcohol, tobacco and other drug use.
- Point out the immediate consequences of tobacco and marijuana use—for example, that smoking causes bad breath, stained teeth and makes clothes and hair smell. Most children at this age are not concerned about the long-term consequences of drug abuse. But, they are concerned about short-term consequences such as embarrassing themselves, smelling bad, disappointing people they care for and getting into trouble.
- Reaffirm your expectation that they will not use.
- Decide together on the consequences your child will face if they break family rules regarding drug and alcohol use.
- Your child's friends will change as they enter new schools. Get to know the new friends, their parents and communicate with them often. Develop common free time, party and curfew rules with the parents of your child's new friends.
- Remember at this age, your kids are developing important social skills. Alcohol and/or marijuana use will seriously harm that development, causing lifelong challenges.
- Remind them that any medicines taken without a doctor's supervision can be just as dangerous as taking illicit drugs or alcohol.

Tenth through Twelfth grades: (15-18 years old)

Older teens have likely had to make decisions about whether or not to try alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. They sometimes witness their peers using drugs—some without obvious or immediate consequences, others whose drug use gets out of control. To be able to resist the peer pressure to use, teenagers need more than a general message not to use drugs.

It is illegal to purchase or
consume alcohol until age 21.

PRIMARY ISSUE: The teenage brain is still developing. Alcohol and drug use can impair parts of the brain that control motor coordination, impulse control, memory, judgment and decision-making capacity.

- Anyone can become addicted to alcohol and drugs—including those prescribed by a physician.
- Alcohol and drug use can have serious, permanent consequences:
 - Impairment of abstract thinking caused by alcohol can lead to lower grades and to lower college entrance exam scores.
 - Failing a pre-employment drug test will keep you from getting a job.
- Federal law prohibits giving financial aid to a college applicant with a drug record.
- Continue to communicate with other parents, particularly around events such as prom, spring break and graduation.
- Validate that when young people turn 21, they can choose to drink alcohol because it is legal and because their bodies are better able to handle it.

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PARENTING TIP #5

Help your child deal with pressure and practice saying, "NO!" Rehearse specific social situations in which friends offer drugs and have your children develop and practice comfortable ways to refuse the offer. Give them permission to use you as an excuse: "If my parents find out, I'll be grounded for a month. It's not worth it."



www.DrugFreeCincinnati.org

Youth @ Work:

As children grow, they face many transitions and new experiences on their journey to adulthood. Taking a job is one such task.

The workplace is a new environment with a new set of challenges. All are important steps toward independence and self-identity.

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before and

Traffic crashes are the number one killer of teens; more than one-third of teen traffic crashes are alcohol-related.

-National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Safety Facts, 2003

PRIMARY ISSUE: Going to work can expose teens to a variety of factors that increase the likelihood of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs being available.

- Driving is a privilege. Set limits on car usage and continue to ask about who your son or daughter is with and where he or she is going.
- Help your teen set up a bank account and create a budget. Encourage saving his or her hard-earned money for long-term goals.
- Teens may be invited to social activities outside of work. While they may want to fit in with this new peer group, maintain family rules about parties, curfews and alcohol, tobacco and other drug usage.
- Older adults have legal access to tobacco and alcohol. Repeat conversations about refusing offers to use substances. Practice how to handle this new peer and social situation.

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PARENTING TIP #6

Teach your children money management, time management and stress management skills. Continue to monitor their friends and their activities and support them in this time of transition.



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Life after High School Graduation:

(18 and older)

Because drinking rates among college students are considerably higher after graduating from high school, parents of college-bound teens need to be aware of the risks their children are likely to encounter away from home.

An unfamiliar atmosphere, large amounts of unstructured and unsupervised time, new friends and the pressure to make good grades all contribute to making this a difficult time. Students may turn to alcohol and other drugs to relieve stress, celebrate or unwind. Unfortunately, some parents make the mistake of accepting high-risk drinking on college campuses as a “rite of passage” into adulthood.

Attitudes toward impairment have changed throughout the past 20 years. For college students, high-risk drinking and impairment is often the desired outcome of a drinking session. Unfortunately, parents don’t realize how very dangerous this change in attitude is.

For adults who choose to drink, moderation is defined as no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks per day for men.

-United States Department of Agriculture
Based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans

BEFORE YOUR CHILD GOES TO COLLEGE, take the opportunity to continue to reinforce anti-drug and alcohol messages.

- Remind your child that education is their priority, and you expect that they will not drink alcohol until the legal age of 21.
- Help them see that many students on college campuses choose not to drink.
- Tell your student that excessive drinking can result in alcohol poisoning. They should call 911 if the following signs are present:
 - Unconsciousness
 - Cold, clammy skin
 - Slowed, difficult breathing
- There are no mood altering drugs that will enhance your academic performance.
- Be creative and help your child identify positive stress relievers.
- Even though they may be living away from home, they still need your love and guidance.

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PARENTING TIP #7

When helping your child select a college, find out and discuss the school's alcohol and drug policy. Discuss the penalties of underage drinking including date rape, violence and academic failure.



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Be prepared for the "Did you do it?" question . . .

Today's parents are conflicted about their own drug use. Many parents may have used drugs in their youth, but gave them up long ago. The most important thing is to not avoid talking about drugs because you are afraid to answer this question.

You can handle this discussion in a variety of ways. Consider the situation, the age of your child, the tone of the conversation and, to some degree, use your instincts to guide your decision. Be sure to listen, slow down the dialogue and ask for feedback throughout the conversation.

If you did not try drugs in your youth, the answer is simple—explain to your child why you chose not to take the risk. If you did experiment with drugs, think about why you decided to use and to quit so you will be ready to have this discussion with your child.

If addiction runs in the family, children need to know that they have more risk for alcohol and other drug problems.

TO BEGIN THIS CONVERSATION, before answering the question, ask your child why they're asking. Based on what you hear, use the following guidelines to continue the conversation.

- Talk to them about why you no longer use.
- Discuss the negative effects of your usage.
- Be honest, do not glorify or glamorize the experience.
- Explain that you may have made some poor decisions during your youth. Based on what you have learned and better information, explain to your child that you want to help him or her stay healthy and drug-free, just like you want him or her to wear a bicycle helmet.
- Discuss how the drugs today are a lot stronger, so the risk is far greater today than when you tried them.
- This is an ideal time to discuss the genetic component of alcohol and other drug abuse and family history, if you have one.
- There is no medical value to smoking marijuana. There are some conditions in which THC, a chemical contained in marijuana, can be helpful. THC is prescribed only by doctors in pill form. The risk of smoking marijuana greatly outweighs the benefits of the chemical.

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