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OUR VISION

A community where parents are empowered with the knowledge and resources to properly educate their children about the dangers of drugs and alcohol use, preparing them to make safer and healthier choices.

OUR MISSION

Addiction is Real exists to provide parents and caregivers the tools to take a proactive approach in discussing the dangers of substance use with their child, as well as recognize signs of risky behavior.

“In three years of this expo, Addiction is Real had the best exhibit we have ever had. It was met with a steady flow of parents and they were blown away with the eye opening experience.”

School Counselor
Selvidge Middle School



OUR HISTORY

Addiction is Real began with a simple question: How can we educate parents on the dangers of drugs and alcohol AND provide them with the tools needed to guide and engage their children through this very rough and sensitive terrain? Unfortunately, the circumstances surrounding our group’s passion to do more was grounded in loss, but also a deep and passionate understanding of how important it is to speak to your child early and often about the dangers of drugs and alcohol.

There is a great power in being a parent. The power to reason. The power to influence. The power to counter temptation. The power to love. It comes from the heart, and make no mistake, teens are fueled by it. Sustained by it. To use it is to keep them alive. To ignore it is to risk everything.

ABOUT US

Addiction is Real is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Founded in 2015 by a group of concerned parents, we are determined to engage our community and reach as many parents as possible. If you are interested in the services we provide, would like to volunteer, donate or bring one of our live events to your community/business visit us at www.addictionisreal.org or contact us. We would love to hear from you!



“

“Addiction is Real’s presentation is a must see for all parents. The knowledge it offers is a powerful tool that parents need to support their children.”

”

*Principal at
Parkway West Middle*

THE IMPORTANCE OF TALKING TO YOUR KIDS

TALK TO YOUR KIDS

If you don't, they'll seek answers elsewhere.

Just as you protect your kids from illnesses like measles, you can help “immunize” them against the disease of addiction. Parents who are educated about the effects of drug use and addiction can give their kids correct information and clear up misconceptions.

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY

U.S. middle school students:

12 years is the average age of first prescription misuse¹

13 years is the average age of first use of alcohol¹

14 years is the average age of first use of marijuana¹

50% of middle school students have used a vape product²

21.7% of middle school students regularly use marijuana²

by age 12 10% of youth say they have used alcohol. By age 15 that number jumps to 50%³

by 3rd & 4th grade children begin setting expectations of whether they will consume alcohol or restrain from doing so as they mature⁴

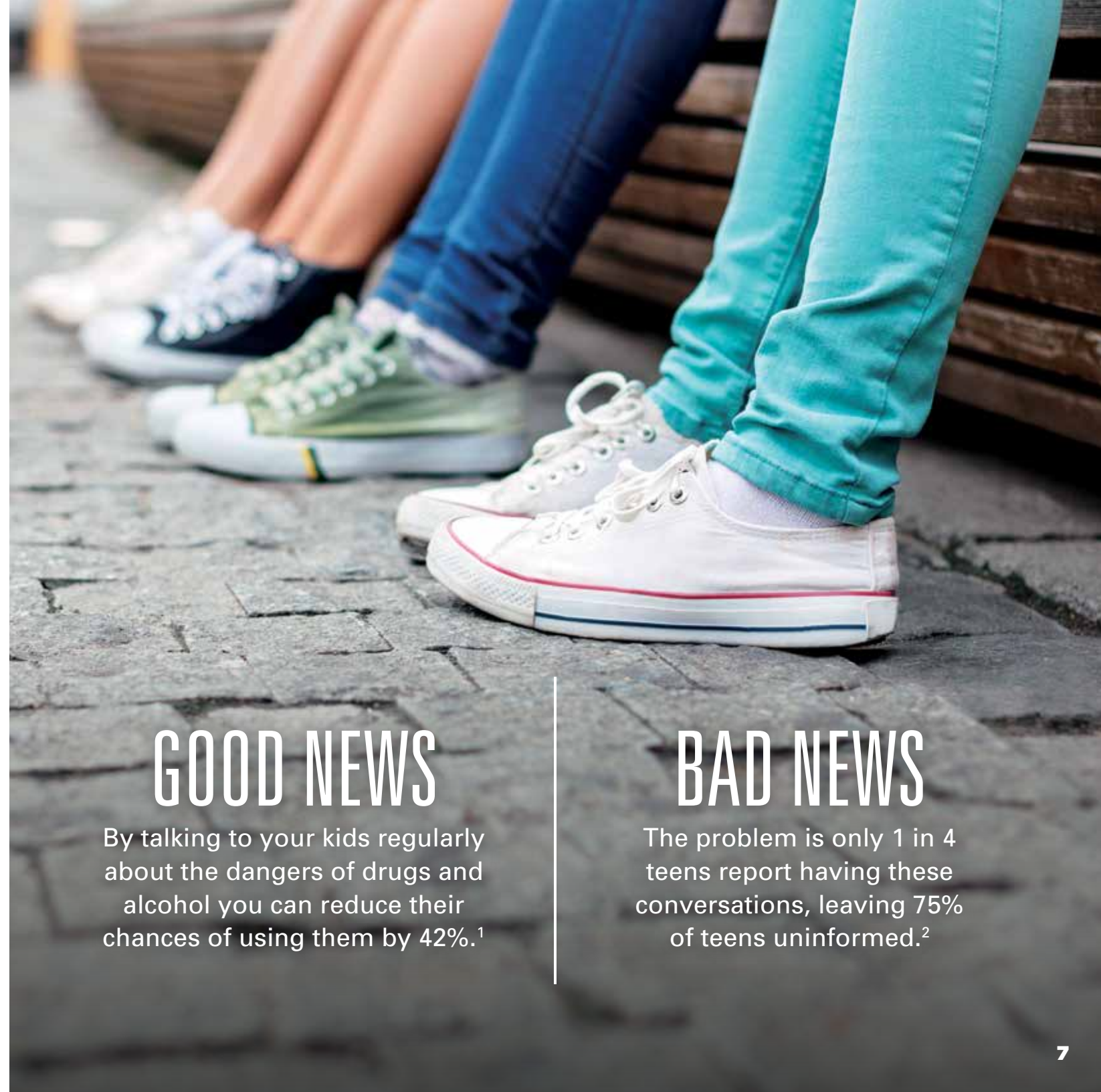
2/3 of youth age 13 to 17 say losing their parents' respect and pride is one of the main reasons they don't smoke marijuana or use other drugs⁵

SOURCES:

1. 2022 Missouri Student Survey 2. Centers for Disease Control
3. SAMHSA 4. Center for Parenting Ed
5. Office of National Drug Control Policy

SOURCES (right):

1. National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
2. Partnership to End Addiction



GOOD NEWS

By talking to your kids regularly about the dangers of drugs and alcohol you can reduce their chances of using them by 42%.¹

BAD NEWS

The problem is only 1 in 4 teens report having these conversations, leaving 75% of teens uninformed.²

WHAT IS DRUG ADDICTION?

WHAT IS DRUG ADDICTION?

Drug addiction is a chronic disease characterized by drug seeking and use that is compulsive or difficult to control, despite harmful consequences. The initial decision to take drugs is voluntary for most people, but repeated drug use can lead to structural and functional brain changes that challenge an addicted person's self-control and interfere with their ability to resist intense urges to take drugs.¹ Just as cardiovascular disease damages the heart, addiction hijacks and permanently rewires the brain.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BRAIN WHEN A PERSON TAKES DRUGS?

In the brain, pleasure has a distinct signature: the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the nucleus accumbens. In nature, rewards usually come only with time and effort. Addictive drugs provide a shortcut to the brain's reward system by flooding the nucleus accumbens with dopamine.

Addictive drugs can release two to 10 times the amount of dopamine that natural rewards do, and they do it more quickly and more reliably. In a person who becomes addicted, brain receptors become overwhelmed. The brain adapts by reducing the ability of cells in the reward system to respond to the drugs. This reduces the high that the person feels compared to the high they felt when first taking the drug – an effect known as tolerance.

These brain adaptations often lead to the person becoming less and less able to derive pleasure from other things they once enjoyed, like food, sex, or social activities. At this point, compulsion takes over. The pleasure associated with an addictive drug subsides – and yet the memory of the desired effect and the need to recreate it (the wanting) persists. Long-term use also causes changes in other brain chemical systems and circuits, affecting functions that include learning, judgment, decision-making, stress, memory and behavior.²

SOURCES:

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
2. www.helpguide.org/harvard/how-addiction-hijacks-the-brain.html

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE BECOME ADDICTED TO DRUGS WHILE OTHERS DON'T?

No one factor can predict if a person will become addicted to drugs. A combination of factors influences risk for addiction. The more risk factors a person has, the greater the chance that taking drugs can lead to addiction.

Biology

The genes people are born with account for about 50% of a person's risk for addiction.¹ Some diseases, like sickle cell anemia or cystic fibrosis, are caused by an error in a single gene. However, most diseases, including addiction, are considered genetically complex and involve variations in a number of different genes.² Gender, ethnicity, and the presence of other mental disorders may also influence risk for drug use and addiction.

Environment

Genetics and environmental factors are thought to play equal roles in the onset of addiction. A person's environment includes many different influences, from family and friends to economic status and

general quality of life. Factors such as peer pressure, early exposure to alcohol and drugs, stress, and parental guidance can greatly affect a person's likelihood of drug use and addiction.

Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood (0-17 years). Exposure to ACEs has been scientifically linked to chronic health problems, mental illness and substance use problems in adolescence and adulthood.³

ACEs include but are not limited to:

- Experiencing violence, abuse or neglect
- Witnessing violence in the home or community
- Having a family member attempt or die by suicide
- Mental health problems in the home
- Substance use in the home
- Instability due to divorce or incarceration

Creating and sustaining safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children and families can prevent ACEs and help all children reach their full potential.⁵

SOURCES:

1. www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction
2. National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
3. Clinical EEG and Neuroscience
4. National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
5. www.cdc.gov

Children who begin drinking at age **13** have a **45%** chance of becoming alcohol-dependent.

A person who starts drinking at the legal age of **21** has only a **7%** chance of becoming addicted.⁴

WHY DO KIDS USE DRUGS?

TOP 8 REASONS WHY KIDS USE DRUGS¹

There is no single reason why teenagers use drugs or alcohol. But here are some of the core issues and influences behind the behavior of teenage drug and alcohol use.

It's important that you, as a parent, understand these reasons and talk to your kids about the dangers of drinking and doing drugs.

1. Other People
(teens, friends, parents using)
2. Popular Media
(music, movies)
3. Escape & Self-Medication
(mental disorders – depression, anxiety, ADHD, bipolar, etc.)
4. Boredom
5. Rebellion
6. Instant Gratification
7. Lack of Confidence
8. Misinformation

SOURCE:
1. Partnership to End Addiction



MARIJUANA MAY HURT THE DEVELOPING TEEN BRAIN

The teen brain is still developing and is especially vulnerable to drug use.

Regular heavy marijuana use by teens can lead to an IQ drop of up to 8 points.

HEAVY MARIJUANA USE BY TEENS IS LINKED TO:

EDUCATION RISKS



Lower grades and exam scores



Less likely to graduate from high school or college



Less likely to enroll in college

LIFE RISKS



Lower satisfaction with life



More likely to earn a lower income



More likely to be unemployed

SOURCES:

National Institute on Drug Abuse; NSDUJ; SAMHSA, 2014; MTF Survey; Meier et al., 2021; MTF Survey et al., 2013; Silins et al., 2014; Tucker et al., 2005; Homel et al., 2014; Volkow et al., 2014; Fergusson and Boden, 2008; Brooks et al., 2013

THE TEENAGE BRAIN



JUDGEMENT DEVELOPS LATE

The area of the brain that controls “executive functions” – including weighing long-term consequences and controlling impulses – is among the last to fully mature. This is a factor in rash decisions made by teenagers, who too often don’t fully think through their decisions. Parents need to repeatedly discuss with their children the dangers of substance abuse during this crucial time, when the brain is still developing and can become permanently stunted by early substance abuse.

SOURCE:
National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD

The dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex “executive functions”

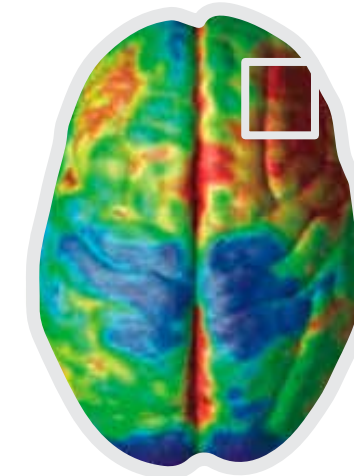
During adolescence, the child’s brain is unevenly developed and is not necessarily capable of the tasks parents believe should be occurring (planning, cause-effect analysis, learning, regret).

Red/Yellow:
Parts of brain less fully mature



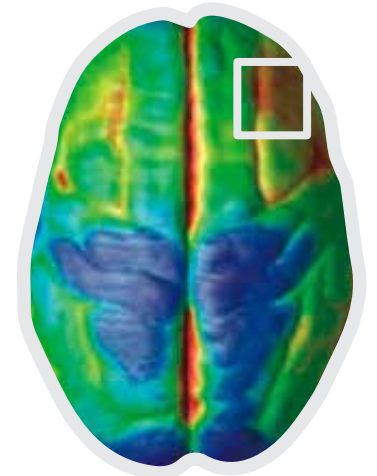
Blue/Purple:
Parts of brain more fully matured

5-YEAR-OLD



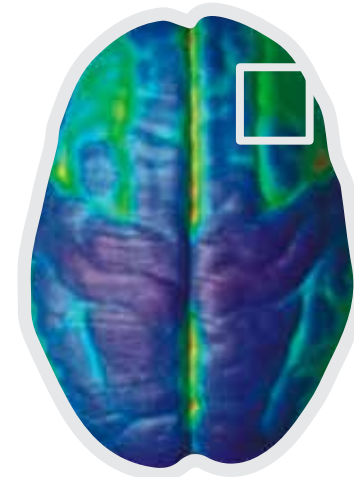
Front

PRETEEN



Back

TEEN



dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex

20-YEAR-OLD



SOURCE:
Psychology Today, Parenting and the Amazing Teen Brain

CARING FOR YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH

HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR AND MENTAL HEALTH

Poor mental health in adolescence is more than feeling blue. It can impact many areas of a teen's life. Youth with poor mental health may struggle with school and grades, decision making, and their health.

Mental health problems in youth often go hand-in-hand with other health and behavioral risks like increased risk of drug use, experiencing violence, and higher risk sexual behaviors than can lead to HIV, STDs, and unintended pregnancy.

Because many health behaviors and habits are established in adolescence that will carry over into adult years, it is very important to help youth develop good mental health.

The good news is that teens are resilient, and we know what works to support their mental health: feeling connected to school and family.

- *Globally, one in seven 10 to 19-year-olds experiences a mental health disorder. Many more struggle with mental health issues.*
- *Depression, anxiety and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.*
- *Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15 to 29 year-olds.*
- *The consequences of failing to address adolescent mental health conditions extend to adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults.*

HOW PARENTS CAN SUPPORT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

- Communicate openly and honestly, including about their values.
- Supervise their adolescent to facilitate healthy decision-making.
- Spend time with their adolescent enjoying shared activities.
- Become engaged in school activities and help with homework.
- Volunteer at their school.
- Communicate regularly with teachers and administrators.

MANAGING SCREEN TIME ADDICTION

On average, children ages 8-12 in the United States spend 4-6 hours a day watching or using screens, and teens spend up to 9 hours. Teens' dependency on their cell phone and specifically social media platforms is a growing concern not only in families but among educators and therapists. Excess screen time has been linked to an increase in teen depression, anxiety, stress, and poorer mental health overall. Research also shows that cyberbullying has a stronger impact on adolescent victims than traditional bullying. This includes young people being at higher risk of suicidal thoughts and attempts.

SOURCE:

Psychology Today, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

Too much screen time may lead to:

- Sleep problems
- Lower grades in school
- Reading fewer books
- Less time with family and friends
- Not enough outdoor or physical activity
- Weight problems
- Mood problems
- Poor self-image and body image issues
- Fear of missing out
- Less time learning other ways to relax and have fun

A FEW PRACTICAL STEPS TO LIMIT SCREEN TIME CAN BOOST TEENS' OVERALL WELL-BEING:

Create a technology contract

This way teens/kids have a clear understanding of the guidelines for using their phone/screens and the consequences when they break the rules.

Model proper smartphone behavior

It's not only about monitoring but more about mentoring. Model the same behavior that you ask of your child.

Lights out, screens out

Whatever time you have designated is the time that phones are locked-up until morning. Having a good night's rest will not only improve mental wellness but also help your teen's academic performance and overall mood.



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT SUBSTANCE ABUSE

PRACTICE REFUSAL SKILLS WITH YOUR KIDS

Teens need ready-made comebacks to have in their pocket for when friends and peers start putting on the pressure. And most often, the person who offers and puts on the pressure WILL BE a friend or someone they know. Here are some tips:

- Discuss various ways to say “no” with your child and choose a couple options that are most comfortable
- Rehearse/role play regularly
- Be assertive and make eye contact when refusing
- Expect offers to use alcohol and drugs to come from friends and acquaintances

- Create an “exit strategy” so your child has a ‘no questions asked’ way to contact you and leave a social situation

EXAMPLES:

Compliment the person.

“Thanks for offering, but I’m good.”

State the consequence or problem.

“The trouble is my parents drug test me.”

Offer an alternative that shows you value the person.

“Let’s just hang out instead.”

Leave in a way that doesn’t offend.

“I have to get to my brother’s basketball game. See you another time.”

When it comes to talking to your kids about drugs & alcohol

**BE PROACTIVE,
NOT REACTIVE.**



SOURCE:
National Council on Alcoholism
and Drug Dependence

TROUBLED TEEN WARNING SIGNS

PHYSICAL

- Bloodshot eyes/pupils that are smaller or larger than normal
- Frequent nosebleeds
- Changes in appetite or sleep
- Sudden weight loss or weight gain
- Shakes, tremors, incoherent or slurred speech
- Seizures without a history of epilepsy
- Deterioration in personal grooming or physical appearance
- Impaired coordination, injuries/accidents/bruises that they won’t or can’t tell you about
- Lack of proper hygiene
- Self-harm

BEHAVIORAL

- Skipping class, declining grades, getting in trouble at school
- Loss of interest in extracurricular activities, hobbies, sports or exercise
- Consistent dishonesty and/or no remorse for actions
- Missing money, valuables, prescription drugs
- Acting isolated, silent, withdrawn, engaging in secretive behaviors
- Clashes with family values and beliefs
- Preoccupation with alcohol and drug-related lifestyle in music, clothing and posters
- Demanding more privacy, locking doors and avoiding eye contact

- Sudden change in relationships, friends, hangouts, and hobbies
- Frequently getting into trouble (arguments, fights, accidents)
- Using incense, perfume, or air freshener to hide other smells
- Using eyedrops to mask bloodshot eyes and dilated pupils

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Unexplained, confusing change in personality and/or attitude
- Mood changes, irritability, angry outbursts or laughing at nothing
- Unusual hyperactivity or agitation
- Lack of motivation; inability to focus, appears lethargic or “spaced out”
- Appears fearful, withdrawn, anxious, or paranoid, with no reason
- Suicidal ideation

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT DRUGS & ALCOHOL

- Listen before you talk — encourage conversation
- Talk to your child and ask open-ended questions
- Be involved
- Set expectations, limits and consequences
- Be honest and open
- Be positive
- Discuss family history

TALKING ABOUT DRUGS WITH KIDS: PRESCHOOLERS



It may seem premature to talk about drugs with preschoolers, but the attitudes they form now are the foundation for the decisions they'll make when they're older. Talk often with your preschoolers, and listen to what they have to say.

PLAYING GROWN-UP

At this early age, children often like to play grown-up by pretending to be adults, mimicking what adults do and say. **Your words and actions make a lasting impression**, so let your child know how you feel about substance use. If you drive up to the supermarket, for example, and see someone standing outside smoking, tell your child that smoking is harmful and that it causes people to get very sick and sometimes die.

TEACHING ON THEIR LEVEL

Children this age are capable of understanding your explanation about poison and harmful things in your home, such as cleaning products, paint, gasoline and more. Caution your children to eat or drink only what you, a grandparent, or another caregiver gives them. If your child becomes sick and you administer medicine, use this opportunity to explain that medicine helps the person it is meant for but can harm someone else who takes it. **Warn children to never take a drug unless it is meant for them.**

SOURCE:

Drug Enforcement Administration and U.S. Department of Education, Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention, Washington, D.C. 2021.

SHORT BUT HONEST ANSWERS

Preschool children are curious and eager to learn, but they also have relatively short attention spans. When they ask questions, **answer honestly but don't overwhelm them**. For example, you or another adult might occasionally drink alcohol or use marijuana recreationally/medically. Four-year-old Jimmy wants to know if he can taste your wine. You might say:

"No, Jimmy, this is only for adults who are at least 21 years old. It can make children very sick if they drink it. Why don't you help me fix you a glass of apple juice instead?"



DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

It's important to teach your children how to make good decisions early in life. One way to do that is to **let your children make their own decisions - but only if they don't endanger their well-being**.

For example:

Explain early and often about how healthy foods help children grow up to be fit and strong.

- If they are especially enamored by a fictional character or famous athlete, encourage them to eat healthy foods so they will grow up to be healthy and strong like their idols. This gives your child the background knowledge to make smart food choices.

When feasible, let your preschooler choose what clothing to wear - even if they make a few mistakes.

- Letting them choose builds confidence in their own decision-making ability.



TALKING ABOUT DRUGS WITH KIDS:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (AGES 5-10)



At the lower end of this age range, children are very perceptive and anxious to learn. This is a good time to introduce more detail into your conversations about drugs, especially what they are and the consequences of using them. Explain the concept of addiction - that some people may not understand how harmful drugs are or that some people try drugs and then have a hard time quitting.

SAFE DRUGS & UNSAFE DRUGS

Kids in this age group may ask why some drugs are good for you and others aren't. This is a good time to explain to them that **prescription medication should be taken only when a doctor tells you** and only when administered by an adult. Tell your child that taking drugs even one time can make you sick or even kill you.

HONESTY & PRAISE

Explain in more detail how dangerous it is for children to drink alcohol and how harmful it is to their developing brain and body. **Tell them the truth: even relatively small amounts of alcohol can make a child sick.** If your children aspire to be like someone famous, such as a sports figure,



remind them that it's important to take care of their body and to not use nicotine, alcohol, or drugs if they want to excel. Children this age crave praise, so give it out freely when deserved. For example, let them know you think they are super smart for disliking the smell of cigarette smoke. This type of interaction also assures children they are capable of making healthy choices - in this case, they dislike cigarettes and don't want to be around them.

REPEAT YOURSELF

While in elementary school, children need to be warned about the dangers of using any drug - including over the counter medication not given to them by a parent. Counterfeit prescription pills can be laced with lethal doses of substances like fentanyl.

WHEN THEY ASK...

When children in this age group ask questions, it's often because of something they have seen or heard, and **it's important to know where they are getting their information.** For example, your eight-year-old may ask, "What is pot?" First, clarify that your child is referring to marijuana by asking where your child learned about it and what exactly was heard, read, or seen. Based on that, you might answer:

"Pot is a dangerous drug that people smoke, vape or eat. Sometimes substances are mixed with marijuana that could kill you. I know you hear about adults who use marijuana for fun and for medical reasons but it can cause serious harm to your developing brain. I hope you understand that it is not safe for a kid to try."



INVOLVE OTHERS

Children this age still respect adults, particularly law enforcement. As your child enters elementary school, offer to help establish or administer a drug education program that includes outside resources.

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY CHOICES & SMART DECISION-MAKING

Talk to your kids often about making good choices and about healthy living and smart goal setting. **Let them make age-appropriate decisions, and reward them when they do well.** Doing so empowers them and gives them confidence in their decision-making skills.

BEFORE LEAVING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, YOUR CHILDREN SHOULD KNOW:

- ✓ *The immediate effects of alcohol and drug use on different parts of the body, including risks of coma or fatal overdose*
- ✓ *The long-term consequences – how and why drugs can be addictive and make users lose control of their lives*
- ✓ *The reasons why drugs are especially dangerous for growing bodies*
- ✓ *The problems that alcohol and other illegal drugs cause not only to the user, but the user's family and world*

SOURCES:

Drug Enforcement Administration and U.S. Department of Education, Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention, Washington, D.C. 2021.

www.actmissouri.org/facts&resources.asp

TALKING ABOUT DRUGS WITH KIDS:

MIDDLE SCHOOL (AGES 11-14)



Your child's transition to middle school (or junior high) calls for special vigilance. If you began having regular conversations with your child at a young age, the child should know with certainty where you stand on the subject of drugs and alcohol. If you didn't have those conversations earlier, it's not too late to start! In fact, this is the time when you should spend even more time talking and listening, as your child is likely seeing more substance use on television, in movies, online and at school or in social situations. Children this age are capable of engaging in more in-depth conversations about why people use drugs, the potential dangers, and the consequences for the user and their family.

TAKE THE LEAD

Your child may not initiate as many conversations about drugs and alcohol with you as before. **It's important for you to take the lead and engage your child in discussions** by using real-life events in the news or in your own lives. For example, your child tells you that a friend named Kevin rode in a vehicle driven by an older brother who was smoking marijuana while driving. Explain to your child the importance of not riding in a car with someone who is using alcohol or drugs, and explain what to do in that situation. You might say, "What Kevin's brother did was illegal, and he could go to jail if caught. But more important, he could have had a serious accident. I hope you know you can call me if that ever happens to you, and I will come and get you. You'll be driving in a few years, and I'm glad you are smart enough to know better than to drink or do drugs and drive."

SOURCE:

Drug Enforcement Administration and U.S. Department of Education, Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention, Washington, D.C. 2021.

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY GROWTH

Conversations with your child should also include talking about their interests. Activities such as youth groups, arts, music, sports, community service, and academic clubs keep children occupied, develop team-building skills, provide a sense of discipline, and sometimes help kids discover talents they didn't realize they had. **Encourage your children to share their dreams and ask what types of activities they enjoy**, and then find a way to nurture those interests in positive ways.

SELF-IMAGE

At this age, young teens start to care more about how they look. Remind them that it is normal for their bodies to change. Find healthy ways to help boost their confidence and manage stress and talk about how alcohol and other drugs can harm them. If your children are interested in sports, talk to them about how making healthy choices can help them perform better than a "quick fix" like anabolic steroids.

FRIENDS & THEIR PARENTS

Kids want to fit in or feel normal around older teens who may expose them to alcohol, nicotine, or drugs. **Get to know your child's friends.** If you're giving a group of kids a ride to an activity, for example, make small talk with the friends by asking about their interests, their family, or what music or television shows they like. **And get to know the parents of your child's friends** and share with them your desire to raise a drug-free child. If your child regularly hangs out with the same five friends, you could have as many as ten extra caregivers keeping their eyes and ears on your child's activities!

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Your ongoing conversations with your children should **include how to respond if someone offers them drugs or alcohol.** Let your child practice his answers. "No, thanks. I'm not into that." or "Nah, I play on the basketball team and don't want to risk it." Assure your children you will come get them any time - without scolding - if they need to leave a place where alcohol or drugs are being used. If you can't be available, find a responsible adult who will go in your place.

ASKING & LISTENING

Your role as a parent (or caregiver) isn't just to talk to your kids, but to also listen. **It's up to YOU to ask open-ended questions that require more than a simple "yes" or "no" answer.** Conversation starters can come from the media or from real life. For example, you might say, "What do you think about the lyrics in this song - when the guy sings, 'I took a pill in Ibiza, to show Avicii I was cool?' What does that make you think about? How do you feel about that?"

FENTANYL - A PARTICULAR CONCERN

Teen drug experimentation is riskier than ever before. Illicit fentanyl is now being found in every state and kids are dying from fentanyl poisoning, sometimes the first time they reach for a pill. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50-100 times more powerful than morphine. The DEA reports that more than 60% of fake pills seized in 2021 contained a lethal dose of fentanyl. Have you talked to your kids about the dangers of fentanyl and fake prescription pills? Be sure your child understands that just one pill can kill.

WHAT DO THEY THINK?

Continue to teach your children to be critical of how drugs and alcohol are portrayed in videos, movies, and television shows. Do they think engaging in risky behavior after drinking too much is attractive or embarrassing? Does a video that shows drugs make them curious enough to want to try them? Continue to talk to your kids often about making good choices and about healthy living and goal setting.



TALKING ABOUT DRUGS WITH KIDS:

HIGH SCHOOL (AGES 15-18)



By the time teens enter high school, they have likely had many opportunities to try drugs, alcohol, or nicotine. Even if they have resisted the temptation, they've probably seen peers do it - sometimes to excess and perhaps even with serious consequences. In fact, they may know fellow classmates with addiction issues. You can't choose your children's friends, but you can encourage them to talk to their friends about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, and develop friendships with kids who do not smoke, drink, or do drugs.

WHAT THEY'RE THINKING

Teens this age typically understand how substance use can affect unborn children, how combining drugs can be deadly, and how easy it is to go from casual use to abuse to addiction. Enforce these concepts when talking with your teenager. During the last few years of high school teens are thinking about what their future holds, so this is a great time to keep reminding them that substance use can ruin their chances of getting into college, being accepted by the military, or being hired for certain jobs.

DEBATING WHAT'S LEGAL

Many states have joined the trend of legalizing different drugs locally - but they are still illegal federally. Make sure your child knows that you expect them to not use any of these substances - even if their friends or someone they know use it for medical reasons.

GRANTING INDEPENDENCE - WITH LOVE

Children this age want independence, but you need to set limits. Set curfews and other expectations for your child's behavior, establish appropriate consequences for breaking rules, and consistently follow through with enforcement. Finally, **tell children often that you care about them and that they are important to you.** Show them you mean it by regularly spending one-on-one time with them. Developing this strong bond will make your child more likely to come to you with questions or concerns about drugs, alcohol, or other sensitive issues. Remember, even as children are pushing for independence, they need someone they love and respect to be involved. They need YOU!

KNOW WHAT'S TRENDY

New drugs and ways to use them are constantly emerging in your teen's life. Routinely ask your child which drugs are issues at school, in friends' homes, and at parties. Know what they look like and how to identify them.

DRIVING RESPONSIBLY

As teens begin to drive and become even more independent, establish clear rules about drinking or using drugs while driving. Ask for their input; then **develop a written agreement that spells out expectations** for behavior and specific consequences for breaking the rules. For example, you may want to limit the hours your teen can drive and grant (or deny) permission to transport younger siblings. Whether or not your city or state restricts the number of passengers in your teen's car, you can do so as part of your written agreement. You and your young driver should sign the agreement to give it more credibility, then keep it in a public area of the home to serve as a constant reminder of what is expected.

Example of a young driver written agreement:

- I will not drink alcohol or use drugs and drive.
- I will drive only from ____ a.m. until ____ p.m.
- I will ask for permission before I give anyone a ride.
- I will refuse any offer of drugs or alcohol, in all social situations.
- I will not ride in a car with opened or unopened drugs or alcohol.
- I will not ride in a car with a driver who has used any drugs or alcohol.

Signed, _____ (Teen) _____ (Parent)

THE "AT-HOME" PARTY

Some parents mistakenly believe "My teens and their friends are safer drinking at home because they aren't out driving while intoxicated." **Even if state law permits teens to drink at home at certain ages under a parent's supervision, it doesn't mean you should let them.** Doing so may be setting a dangerous example, signaling you approve of what may be illegal consumption of alcohol in other settings. And if you give your teen permission to host a party in your home, never supply alcohol to your child's friends. Not only is it illegal, but you may be held liable for anything that happens to the minors and any damage they cause - including what happens when they leave the premises.

LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL



Knowing you are proud of them and the good choices they make can motivate teens to maintain a drug-free lifestyle and to serve as a positive role model for younger siblings. Parenting doesn't stop when a child goes to college. Find out if there is a program during freshman orientation that educates students about campus policies and health and wellness or prevention programs related to alcohol and other drug use. If so, attend with your child, or at least be familiar with the name of the person who is responsible for campus counseling or prevention programs.

Learn about the college's standards of conduct. Federal regulations require any institution of higher education receiving federal funding to have a drug prevention program that prohibits, at a minimum, the unlawful possession, use, or distribution of illicit drugs and alcohol by students on campus property or while participating in its activities. Colleges must enforce these standards or risk serious consequences, including loss of federal student financial assistance. Ask about and understand the college's parental notification policy for standards of conduct violations. Make sure your child understands the penalties for underage drinking, public drunkenness, illicit drug use, using a fake ID, driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, assault, and other alcohol-related offenses.

Make certain your child understands how alcohol and other illicit drug use and abuse can be associated with date rape, violence, and academic failure, as well as have consequences after graduation.

This is also the time to stress the importance of the responsible consumption of alcohol when your college-age children are of legal drinking age, and if they choose to drink.

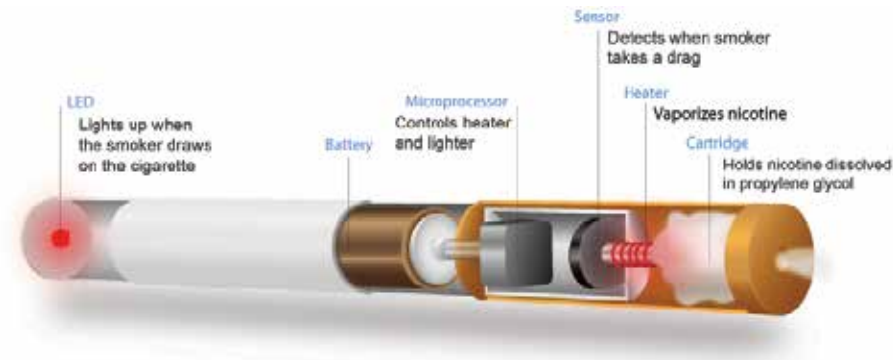
WHY IS VAPING SO POPULAR?

Most vapes are discreet, easy to hide and generally seen by teens as cool and relatively harmless. They come in thousands of tasty flavors that help cover the harsh taste of the chemicals and override the sense that these products might be harmful. They also produce a brief positive sensation or 'head rush' that some people like.

Most also have very high doses of nicotine, which can rapidly make those who vape develop an addiction or become dependent on the product. Some young people are also drawn to the "vape tricks" usually performed with modifiable devices, or 'mod' style vapes. People will breathe aerosol deep into their lungs and then exhale it through their ears, eyes or nose.

Teens say they vape for many reasons. Curiosity is one, and peer pressure is another. Some report self-medicating due to anxiety or other mental health issues. They see friends or family members vaping and they are drawn to the appealing flavors. For others, it's to do vape tricks. Some also say they do it because they feel it is less harmful than other tobacco products and it's also discreet. Increasingly, teens report that they are vaping because they are hooked and can't quit.

WHAT IS A VAPE?¹



NOT "HARMLESS WATER VAPOR"

The aerosol contains chemicals known to cause cancer, birth defects and other reproductive harm.

- Toluene
- Acetaldehyde
- Benzenene
- Cadmium
- Formaldehyde
- Isoprene
- Nickel
- Lead
- N-Nitrosornicotine
- Nicotine

WHAT'S IN A VAPE?

Possible Ingredients that may or may not be listed by manufacturers:

- Glycol/Glycerin
- Flavoring chemicals
- Herbal Substances
- Nicotine
- Synthetic Drugs
- Other dangerous chemicals

SOURCES:

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
2. Partnership to End Addiction

HOW DO YOU OBTAIN VAPES?

- The take-up of vaping by young people is increasing. Research shows that 1 in 5 young people have vaped and nearly 80% of them say it is easy to get a vape illegally at a shop or online.
- Over 60% of teachers report being aware that vape sales have happened in their school.
- 67% of youth that vape report obtaining the device from a family member or friend.



There are over 8 million different types of vapes in development and on the market.

LONG TERM RISKS OF VAPING²



HEALTH RISKS

There are many chemicals in Vape and E-cig devices that cause significant harm to lungs and brain development.



NICOTINE ADDICTION

Vaping nicotine has been conclusively shown to cause addiction, and even vaping flavored compounds without nicotine or illicit drugs have been linked to behavioral dependency.



MARIJUANA ADDICTION

E-cigarettes and vape pens have been significantly linked to marijuana use among adolescents and young adults. Moreover, teens addicted to marijuana are more likely to use alcohol and other illicit drugs.



ADDICTION TO ILLICIT DRUGS

Vape pens provide a sneaky way to use other drugs including synthetic cannabinoids, cocaine, GHB, MDMA, and opioids.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH FENTANYL?

WHAT IS FENTANYL?

Fentanyl is a **potent synthetic opioid** and remains the deadliest drug threat facing this country. What is an opioid? Opioids are a class of drugs naturally found in the opium poppy plant. Opioids are made from the plant directly, whereas synthetic opioids, like fentanyl, are made by scientists in labs using the same chemical structure but synthetic ingredients that **DO NOT** come from a plant.

Because these ingredients are man-made, they are unlimited and therefore much less expensive than the opium plant.

- **POTENT:** Up to 50x stronger than heroin and 100x stronger than morphine. A few grains of sand worth can be lethal.
- **SYNTHETIC:** Not plant based. Made in a lab.
- **OPIOID:** Pain reliever like oxycodone, morphine and heroin.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PHARMACEUTICAL-GRADE FENTANYL & ILLICIT FENTANYL?

MEDICAL FENTANYL	ILLEGALLY MADE FENTANYL
Made in a sterile factory	Made in unsanitary conditions
Carefully blended	Sloppy mixing
Dose is precise and consistent	Dose is random and variable
Carefully administered by doctors	Hidden in the drug supply
Legitimate medical uses	Increase drug dealer profits
Death is uncommon when taken as prescribed by a doctor	Involved in the majority of U.S. drug deaths in recent years

WHERE IS ILLICIT FENTANYL FOUND?

Fentanyl is being integrated into almost all forms of street drugs. In some cases, dealers purposely add fentanyl to their drugs to reduce costs, enhance the effect of an existing drug, hook their customers, or all three. In some cases, the presence of fentanyl is the result of contamination from traffickers handling multiple drugs in unclean environments or mixing several different powders with the same equipment.

- Heroin
- Cocaine
- MDMA (Ecstasy, Molly)
- Methamphetamine
- Marijuana
- Vape Products
- Adderall made of methamphetamine

FENTAPILLS

A fentapill is a counterfeit prescription pill purposely made to resemble legitimate medicines, but instead is made of illicit fentanyl or an illicit fentanyl analog. Counterfeit pills are illegally manufactured, widely accessible and often sold on social media and e-commerce platforms - making them available to anyone, including minors. Any prescription pill you don't get directly from a pharmacy or any powder form drugs

purchased from a friend/drug dealer may contain a lethal dose of fentanyl.

Fentanyl has been widely detected in fake pills including but not limited to:

- Percocet
- Oxycontin
- Norco
- Xanax
- Vicodin
- Valium



60% of pills seized by the DEA and tested for fentanyl in 2022 contained at least 2 mg of fentanyl, which is considered a potentially lethal dose. According to the CDC, 107,375 people in the United States died of drug overdoses and drug poisonings in the 12-month period ending in January 2022. A staggering 67% of those deaths involved synthetic opioids like fentanyl. This is why it's important to talk your child about the risk and dangers of fentanyl.

SOURCES:
Songforcharlie.org and Dea.gov

Talk to your
KIDS.

Tell your
FRIENDS.

Spread the
WORD.

No random pills
or street drugs
ARE SAFE.

PERIOD.

TOP 10 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR KIDS OFF DRUGS

01 Watch for warning signs of drug use, including depression, falling grades, isolation, and change in friends. Find help if you suspect your child is using drugs.

02 Keep all prescription drugs put away. If someone in your family does take prescription drugs, be sure that your teen cannot get their hands on them. Properly and immediately dispose of any leftover prescriptions. Don't make it easy for them to try drugs.

03 Keep your child active. Students that have a goal they are working toward in life or are busy with sports or music are much less likely to get involved with drugs.

04 Take care of their emotions. Teens today are under a lot of pressure with school, sports and relationships. Be careful that they are not too worried or stressed about these things. Teach them good techniques to handle stress.

05 Model good behavior. If your teen sees you doing things like getting drunk, smoking, or self-medicating, they will be more likely to do so themselves. Sometimes this can even lead to worse habits, like drug or alcohol abuse.

06 Don't leave your child unsupervised for long. In a world where many families require two incomes or single parents are raising children, this may be

difficult. But it is so important not to just leave your child to fend for themselves after school. The time when most teens get into trouble or start a harmful behavior is the time between school letting out and when their parents get home.

07 Know your child's friends. If you are suspicious of whom your teen is spending time with, talk to them. Invite the friends over to your house to get to know them. If you have concerns about their friends, talk to your child about it.

08 Know where your teen is. Teens should follow household rules about curfew and keeping you informed about where they are going. If something doesn't seem quite right, don't be afraid to question your child about where they've been. You are the adult and the sooner your child sees that you are going to check up on them, the better.

09 Talk to your child about drugs, and do it early. An ongoing dialog is the best way for your teen to know that you have an understanding of the temptations they face, and are going to do what you can to help them.

10 Know your child. If you work on your relationship with your children when they are young, it will be easier to talk about drugs and know what they are up to when they are older. Build a bond early so it can survive those tough teenage years.

SOURCE:

Drug Enforcement Administration and U.S. Department of Education, Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention, Washington, D.C. 2021.