

Talking about drugs

One of the most effective deterrents to drug use among young people is a parent who wants to spend time with them – someone who talks with them about their friends, what goes on at school, the sport they play and what interests them.

The more parents and other family members get involved in children's lives, the more positive young people will feel about themselves and the more likely they will be to respond favourably to their family's views.

Here are 10 ways to encourage your kids to talk about drugs with you.

1. Be an active part of their lives

Set aside time to spend with your kids. Take an interest in their activities and establish a routine for doing things with them. Spending time as a family is important, like eating together every day. When they go out, don't be afraid to ask where they're going or who they'll be with.

2. Listen to your children

Showing that you're prepared and willing to listen will help your children feel more comfortable about talking with you. During a conversation try not to interrupt them or react in a way that will stop whatever you're discussing. Encourage them to feel comfortable about telling you their problems, and ask for their input on family decisions to show that you value their opinions.

3. Be a role model

When it comes to drugs there's no such thing as 'do as I say, not as I do'. If you take drugs yourself you can't expect your children to take your advice. It's important not to underestimate the influence your behaviour has on them, particularly when it comes to alcohol or tobacco, or misuse of medications.

4. Be honest with them

It's natural that you won't necessarily know everything about drugs. So while it's important to be informed, you shouldn't pretend to have answers to every question. Be prepared to say 'I don't know but I'll find out for you'. If you're honest and clear about where you stand, your kids will find it easier to be honest with you.

5. Pick your moment

Make sure you pick the right time to discuss drugs with your children, by looking for natural opportunities as they arise. This might be when you're all watching TV, or when they're talking about their friends and/or someone at school.

6. Be calm throughout

When it comes to talking about drugs, being calm and rational is important. Do not overreact. Don't ridicule or lecture, as this could make future discussions about drugs more difficult and make your kids more resistant to talking about them at all.

7. Avoid conflict

It's difficult to solve a problem when there's a conflict. Try to see your child's point of view while encouraging them to understand yours. If a confrontation does develop, stop the conversation and come back to it when everyone is calmer.

8. Keep talking

Once you've had a discussion about drugs it's important to have another. Start talking to your children about drugs early, and be willing to talk to your kids about the issue at any time.

9. Set clear boundaries

Generally children expect and appreciate some ground rules. By actively involving them in setting the rules you can encourage them to take more responsibility for sticking to them. Once you've decided on these rules, enforce them, and let your children know the consequences of breaking them.

Discuss and agree to ways your children will act if they find themselves in situations where drugs are present. For example, let them know that you'll always collect them if they need you to, whatever the hour.

However, make it absolutely clear that you would rather they didn't put themselves in a situation where they are likely to be exposed to drugs in the first place.

10. Focus on positives

Recognise your kids' good behaviour and emphasise the things they do well. Encourage them to feel good about themselves and let them know that they deserve respect and should also respect themselves.