



How to Talk with Your Teen about Drugs

Communication Tips for Parents

Parents matter. You are your child's most important role model and their best defence against drug use.

By talking openly with your teen about drugs, you can strengthen your relationship with them. Once you have built a strong relationship, communication will be easier.

When parents and teens disagree they sometimes drift away from each other. As hard as it may be, it is very important that you keep the lines of communication open.

Your teen's point of view is very important.

- ▶ Most teens are happy with their relationship with their parents. However, many teens think their parents are not always there when they need them.
- ▶ As teens grow they need to be able to speak their mind. This may create conflict and during this time, you may think that your teen is not listening to you even though they really are.
- ▶ Remember that when your teen talks back and argues with you, it does not mean they are rejecting you. In fact, the opposite may actually be true. By asserting their independence, your teen is building a stronger and more positive relationship with you.
- ▶ Many teens don't want to talk just about drugs; they would also like to talk about other things such as adulthood and puberty, school issues and friendships.

Beyond a strong relationship and open communication with parents, there are other important factors that can decrease or increase the chances that teens may experiment with drugs.

parents matter

Some of the key factors that can help your teen make the right choices include:

- ▶ a strong family attachment
- ▶ positive involvement in the community
- ▶ connection at school
- ▶ religious and spiritual beliefs
- ▶ social skills
- ▶ positive friendships

strong relationships friends

Some of the key factors that can increase the chances that your child may experiment with drugs are:

- ▶ low self-esteem
- ▶ drug use by friends
- ▶ peer pressure
- ▶ conflict in families
- ▶ poor grades
- ▶ lack of connection at school

open communication

Empower your teen. Help them resist drug use by:

- ▶ nurturing their self-confidence and intelligence;
- ▶ creating a sense of hope and optimism;
- ▶ ensuring they grow up in a safe environment and are involved in extracurricular activities; and,
- ▶ making sure they have the community support that they need.

listen

When talking with your teenager about drugs, here are a few tips to keep in mind.

- ▶ Think first. Act second. Try to stay clear and focused and don't get too emotional. Keep an open mind.
- ▶ Keep an eye on your teen's behaviour. Ask them everyday what they are doing and don't be afraid to set limits such as curfews.
- ▶ Encourage your teen to work with you to set boundaries, but don't be afraid to adopt a strong position when you need to.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to enforce the boundaries you have set. Let your teen know that you are setting boundaries because you care for them and want only the best for them.
- ▶ Find ways to ensure that your teen believes what you say and trusts you.
- ▶ Talk regularly and talk often. Many "mini-conversations" about drugs are better than long boring lectures.
- ▶ When talking with your teen, think about their point of view and listen respectfully to what they have to say.
- ▶ Keep the conversation positive and upbeat rather than waiting for an opportunity to criticize your teen for bad behaviour.
- ▶ Take advantage of "teachable moments" to discuss drug use with your teen. Teachable moments can happen while driving in the car, at the dinner table while discussing a situation at school or a current event in the news.
- ▶ Eat dinner together as often as possible. The family dinner provides one effective way to strengthen your communication with your teen.

prevention

- ▶ Help your teen develop sound reasoning skills and encourage conversations and the open exchange of ideas and feelings.
- ▶ Focus on messages about how drug use affects sports performance, health and appearance. These messages have more impact because this age group is more affected by peer pressure, doubt and feeling insecure. Teens like to feel like they belong, that they look and act like their friends.
- ▶ Have a two-way conversation with your teen. Listen to them and respect their opinion. Provide your teen with information that is meaningful and balanced, without emotion or drama so that he/she feels empowered to make healthy choices about drugs.

Remember to keep the lines of communication open with your teen. Start early and get ahead of the drug questions. Teens should learn about drugs from their parents first. Be clear on where you stand about drugs. You are their most important role model and their best defence against drug use.

This brochure is a companion to the booklet *Talking with Your Teen about Drugs* and Web site for parents: drugprevention.gc.ca

For more information on talking with your teen about drugs, visit drugprevention.gc.ca

How to Talk with Your Teen about Drugs – Communication Tips for Parents is available on Internet at the following address: drugprevention.gc.ca

Additional related resources
• *Help Prevent Drug Use by Your Teen – Tips on Developing Their Resiliency*
• *Talking with Your Teen about Drugs*

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