



TALKING ABOUT DRUGS

TALKING WITH TEENAGERS ABOUT DRUGS

Some parents and guardians may find it difficult to talk with their teenager about drugs. Between illegal drugs and prescription medications, it may be hard to know where to begin. But drugs can be dangerous, and some teenagers are not aware of the risks.

TALKING WITH YOUR TEENAGER

As a parent or guardian, you might need to talk with your teenager about drugs because:

- > Your teenager will hear information about drugs from their friends, the media, even other adults and some of this information will be wrong.
- > Your teenager is not using drugs, but you want to educate them about the risks in case they are ever tempted to try them.
- > Your teenager may not use drugs, but they (or you) are concerned that someone they know might be.
- > You realize (or suspect) that your teenager is using drugs, and you want to help them stop.
- > Your teenager may be asking questions about drugs. Give them reasons to say no.

It is important that parents talk about drugs regularly before there is an urgent need to do so. Many short conversations are better than a few long lectures, and teenagers are more likely to pay attention during shorter chats.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

There is no script for talking with your teenager about drugs. But here are a few tips to keep in mind.

- > Offer them control of the situation. Let them pick the time and place.
- > Look for opportunities to talk about drug use with your teenager, like when you discuss school or current events.
- > Plan the main points you want to discuss, rather than speaking on impulse. Avoid saying everything you think all at once. Instead, target your main points about drugs.
- > Listen to them and respect their opinion. If they see you as a good listener, they may be more inclined to trust your input. Give them room to participate and ask questions.
- > Focus on facts rather than emotions. If your teenager is using drugs, you may feel anger, sadness, fear or confusion. Those are natural reactions. But talking about the issue is more productive than talking about your feelings.
- > Avoid being judgmental.
- > Respect their independence. Tell them you are trying to help them make good decisions, by giving them information they may not know.

- > Be clear about why you are worried. Whatever your teenager may think, communicate that your main concern is for their well-being.

You are your teenager's most important role model and their best defense against drug use. Start early and answer the questions about drugs before they are asked.

TALKING ABOUT MARIJUANA

Teenagers react more positively to facts than to emotional arguments. Here are a few facts about marijuana you can share with them.

- > Today's marijuana is much stronger than marijuana from many years ago. Studies show that the average level of THC, the principal "mind-altering" component of marijuana, has increased by 300% to 400% over the last few decades.
- > Marijuana contains hundreds of substances, some of which are psychoactive and can affect the proper functioning of the brain and body.
- > Regular long-term marijuana use can harm concentration, cause loss of memory, harm the ability to think and make decisions, and decrease IQ. Some of these effects may persist after stopping marijuana use.
- > Marijuana smoke contains many of the same cancer-causing chemicals as tobacco smoke.
- > It is estimated that 1 in 9 marijuana users will develop an addiction to marijuana.

TALKING ABOUT PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Teenagers react more positively to facts than to emotional arguments. Here are a few facts about prescription drug abuse you can share with them.

- > Some prescription drugs (opioid pain relievers, stimulants, and benzodiazepines) have psychoactive (mind-altering) properties, and for this reason they are sometimes used to get high.
- > Psychoactive pharmaceuticals are the third most commonly-abused substances, after alcohol and marijuana, among Canadian youth.
- > Prescription opioids can be just as dangerous as illegal opioid drugs such as heroin.
- > Taking prescription drugs without a doctor's approval is dangerous, and can even be fatal.
- > Prescription drugs, when used improperly or abused, are not safer than illegal drugs.
- > There are many dangerous and unpredictable effects associated with abusing prescription drugs including addiction, overdose and death.

