

Tips on Talking With Your Teenager about Drugs

Talking with children about drugs can be challenging for parents but it is something that has to be done. No one can do this for you and there's no script for it. But, you have to start somewhere.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when talking with your teenage child about drugs:

Think first. Act second. How often have we acted on impulse and regretted it? The same is true for speaking with your children about drugs. Having a sound mind before approaching children will help keep a balance between what you're thinking and what you're saying about drugs to your kids.

Get in the habit. Develop the habit of talking regularly with your child on a variety of subjects. This will greatly facilitate the discussion on the issue of drug use when the time comes.

Just the Facts. Everyone can get emotional around this issue. Some feelings are important but using facts can help keep the focus on the issue, while judgment can lead to misconstrued feelings and spiral the conversation downward toward unproductive ends.

Be clear and focused. You may not be listened to not because of what you're saying, but what your teenager thinks your motivation is for saying it. Keep focused and balanced, and this should steer the conversation in the right place. Staying well tuned in to your motivations and aligning your actions with children accordingly demonstrates a consistent personality that will help the message resonate.

Be inclusive. Reassure your child that you want them to decide for themselves and be independent (that's what teens want, really), but that you're simply trying to help them make an informed decision by providing them with information from a valuable source...you.

Use the News. You can use an external reference like a newspaper article or tv show about drugs to start a conversation with your teenage child. Talking about an external situation can help you discuss the issue of drugs without your teen feeling like you are accusing him or her of drug use.

Offer them control. Teenagers will often test boundaries and at times may try to get control of situations. It's best to try to engage your teen in dialogue on drugs by respecting his or her preferences about when to talk. So, spin the tables around by mentioning that you'd like to talk about drugs with them and let them decide what works for them. By allowing them the control to pick the time, date and location, this also shows respect for their schedule, which will make them feel important.

Constant praise. Rewarding positive behaviour, unexpected praise, showing respect and demonstrating interest in their lives will make you more approachable when they are running into difficulties and need someone to talk to about their problems.

Consistent boundaries. The tried and tested parenting method of setting boundaries is crucial when it comes to drugs. The lines must be clear, enforced and consistent for teens so they can understand the difference between right and wrong. Once boundaries are established, they must continually be repeated, and therefore easier to hold teenagers accountable when the boundary is broken. Talk to your teen about your rules around curfews, choice of friends, and knowing where they are at all times and develop appropriate boundaries together.

Evaluate the Dialogue. After all that, how did it go? The goal of any conversation is to feel as though an exchange of ideas and thoughts has happened. Did it? Were you doing most of the talking or did they? Remember, if you tell them, they might forget, if you show them they might remember, but if you involve them, they'll understand. Give them room to engage and encourage them to participate

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