



Talking with your kids about drugs

Preventing drug abuse begins with preventing drug use.

Some children as young as in third and fourth grades feel pressured to try drugs—especially gateway drugs like alcohol, nicotine (tobacco), and marijuana. Research shows that each of these can increase the chance that the use will turn to even more dangerous drugs like crack or other forms of cocaine, and stimulant or depressant pills. The average age of the first use of illicit drugs (including alcohol) is 12 years! Another concern is misuse of over-the-counter or prescription drugs, especially painkillers.



Constructive communication is one of the most effective tools you can use in helping your child avoid drug use.

The very act of regular two-way communication shows you care. Trust your instincts; communicate as soon as you notice anything unusual or suspicious with your child.

Ways to communicate

- **Through "teachable moments"**—In contrast to a formal sit-down lecture, use a variety of situations; television, books, movies, websites, newspapers, and local situations. Emphasize alternative choices that could have resulted in a better outcome.
- **Face to face, exchanging information and understanding**—Be an active listener and let your child tell you what he or she knows about drugs, what his or her own experiences have been, what fears or concerns already exist.
- **Calmly and openly** — Discuss the facts about drugs. Don't exaggerate. The facts are chilling in and of themselves. Resources like the Anti-Drug Site (www.theantidrug.com) have information on drugs and the consequences of using them.
- **Reasons rather than restrictions**—Challenging current friends might lead to defensive or defiant behavior. Instead, rationally explain why you are concerned.

What to communicate

- **The facts about how drugs harm people—especially young people.** *Physical harm* —depending on the drug, consequences can include hair loss, tooth decay, rapid aging, impaired coordination, etc. Consider referencing information at <http://www.drugfree.org/> or other visual tools. *Social harm*—becoming alienated from friends and family, and other social groups like sports teams. *Educational harm*—impaired memory and attention levels, and reduced motivation. *Financial harm*— loss of job, promotion, or life and professional opportunities in the future; the cost of the drug. *Overall harm*— Drug use can make a person lose themselves. What makes someone unique is gone in the face of addiction to drugs.
- **The fact that you do not find drug use acceptable.** Many children say their parents never stated this simple principle. Don't forget to point out that these drugs are against the law.
- **The fact that there are many of positive, drug-free alternatives** and you will help your child explore them. Show interest in your child and get involved with what they like to do; having a positive adult role model who cares about them will go a long way in giving them a reason to avoid drugs.

- **The fact that you place a high value on your child**—qualities that drugs can and will destroy or diminish. Reinforce the positive aspects of your child—their talents, abilities, and what makes them unique.
- **The power to say no.** Teach your child that they have the right to say no and can resist peer pressure.
- **Use an ongoing dialogue.** Communication won't be as effective if the subject is brought up once. The message should be repeated as an accepted family value. Be sure to encourage and allow for two-way communication.
- **Be an example.** Your child will compare your actions with your words and be guided accordingly. If you choose to drink alcohol, use it in moderation and don't drink and drive. If you smoke, consider quitting—it could help you and your child. Don't use illegal drugs and don't misuse prescription drugs.
- **Be Creative!** Consider interests that you or your child may have in common, or activities that are available in Minneapolis. Try to make the experience fun; positive reinforcement is stronger than negative.

Understanding reasons kids use drugs

Kids may turn to drugs for one or more of these reasons:

- for fun
- to do what friends are doing
- to fit in
- to get through the day
- to escape pain in their lives
- out of boredom
- because of curiosity
- to take risks
- unaware of the effects
- because a role model did it

How can I tell if someone is using drugs?

Identifying possible signs of drug use may help prevent further use. Possible signs:

- **Change in moods** (more irritable, secretive, withdrawn, overly sensitive, inappropriately angry)
- **Less responsible** (coming home late, tardy at school or class, dishonest)
- **Changing friends or changing life-styles** (new interests, unexplained increase in cash)
- **Difficult to communicate with** (refuses to discuss change in behavior, becomes defensive if asked about drug use)
- **Shows physical deterioration** (memory losses, difficulty in concentration, loss of weight, unhealthy appearance)
- **Missing items** (prescription pills, money, other substances around the house)

For more information:

- State and local drug abuse agencies
- State and local mental health agencies
- State and local law enforcement agencies

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>

The National Crime Prevention Council

www.ncpc.org

The Anti-Drug Site

www.theantidrug.com

Minnesota National Guard Counterdrug Program

www.minnesotacounterdrug.com

Partnership for a Drug-Free America

www.drugfree.org

For more information, contact your crime prevention specialist. Call 311 (or 612-673-3000) or see

www.minneapolismn.gov/police/crimeprevention/police_outreach_safe-teamsf to locate your neighborhood crime prevention specialist.

For further crime prevention resources, please visit

<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/police/crimeprevention/index.htm>.



English: Attention. If you want help translating this information, call 612-673-3737

Spanish: Atención. Si desea recibir asistencia gratuita para traducir esta información, llame 612-673-2700

Somali: Ogow. Haddii aad dooneyso in lagaa kaalmeeyo tarjamadda macluumaadkani oo lacag la' aan wac 612-673-3500

Hmong: Ceeb toom. Yog koj xav tau kev pab txhais cov xov no rau koj dawb, hu 612-673-2800

Sign Language: TTY 612-673-2626

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