

Navigating tough conversations with kids

Tips for Parents

7

simple ways to have effective conversations about substance use with your kids.

- **Learn the facts.**

Have a basic understanding of substances such as alcohol, cannabis, nicotine, and non-medical use of medications. If you don't know something, say so — and suggest learning about it together.

- **Set clear family expectations.**

Every family has rules to keep kids safe. For younger children, this means talking simply about substances and why they're not for kids. As children grow, be clear about guidelines, limits, and consequences. For older teens, discuss safer practices if they are using substances.

- **Share your family values.**

Talk about what matters most — health, safety, respect, honesty. A simple “family values” statement can help teens navigate peer and social pressures.

- **Use everyday moments to connect.**

Car rides, errands, or walks are natural opportunities to check in about school, friends, and plans.

- **Listen and support.**

Check in regularly about emotional and mental well-being. Show curiosity, stay open, and praise positive choices and healthy coping strategies.

- **Encourage interests and connections.**

Support sports, creative pursuits, volunteering, or other supervised activities. Get to know your teen's friends and their parents and stay connected with trusted adults in your child's life.

- **Spend time together as a family.**

Regular shared time builds trust and connection, making tough conversations and boundary-setting easier.

Remind your child that you will always be there to support them, no matter what.

Active Listening

Active listening is highly effective for meaningful conversations, building more open communication as your child grows.

Ask open-ended questions.

Encourage more than “yes” or “no” answers.

Try: *“Tell me more about that...” or “What do you think about...?”*

Be positive.

Acknowledge honesty and effort, even in difficult situations.

Try: *“Thank you for sharing. I really appreciate your honesty.”*

Show that you hear them.

Reflect back what you’re hearing — you don’t have to agree, just show understanding.

Try: *“I hear that you feel stressed and that smoking weed helps you relax. Is that right?”*

Summarize and check in.

Confirm you understand and invite more input.

Try: *“Did I get everything? Anything you want to add?”*

Ask permission before offering advice.

Respect their space before giving feedback.

Try: *“Is it okay if I ask about this? Can I share some thoughts?”*

Offer empathy and compassion.

Acknowledge feelings and show understanding.

Try: *“I hear that this helps with your anxiety. I’m sorry you’re feeling that way. Can we think of other ways to relax?”*