

## **How to Talk to Your Kids About Drugs**

*By Stephen Arterburn and Jim Burns*

No parent wants their kids to experience the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse. One of the most effective ways to apply “preventative maintenance” – helping to keep your kids away from drugs and alcohol is through talking. Begin a drug and alcohol conversation with your kids and keep it going. Here are some ideas for your ongoing discussion...

**Learn about drugs and alcohol.** Learn what they do to the body. Learn why kids experiment with drugs and alcohol. Learn why they evolve to using more frequently and then habitually. There are plenty of easily-accessible resources available. See the resource recommendations at the end of this fact sheet.

**Share drug and alcohol information with your kids.** Talk about it! Don’t assume that your kids are learning everything they need to know in school. You have more influence on your kids than a teacher does. Start early on, sharing age-appropriate information with your kids. This will become a topic your kids just assume is part of regular family discussion.

• **Listen.** A key part of good communication is listening. Be sure you don’t simply lecture your kids about drugs and alcohol. Engage in discussion with your kids and really listen for what your kids are telling you about the issues. If you listen, you will learn about your kids’ attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and challenges regarding drugs and alcohol.

**Be open.** Your kids will likely want to know if you used drugs and alcohol when you were a kid. Be prepared on how you will answer this question. You don’t have to share all of your dirty laundry (if you have some) but don’t lie about your past, either. If you used drugs and alcohol in your youth, share appropriately why you believe it was a mistake and what you’ve learned from your experience as a result.

**Help your kids learn how to say no to drugs and alcohol.** Role-play various situations with your kids, so that they can explore ahead of time how to turn down drug and alcohol offers. Here are some examples of situations that your kids might face:

Drug Offers:

1. You are at school in between classes, and someone asks you to walk into the bathroom to smoke a joint.
2. A friend says he has taken some of his mother’s prescription tranquilizers out of the medicine cabinet and asks you to meet him after school to take them.

3. At one of the local hangouts, a girl offers you a red pill and promises it will make you feel as though you are in another world.

**Alcohol Offers:**

1. Your older brother and his friend pick you up from a party, and his friend offers you a cold beer for the trip home.
2. At a party, the group gets into the parents' liquor cabinet. Everyone starts drinking out of the bottle of vodka. It is offered to you.
3. Your friend's dad is offering all of the kids at the party a beer to loosen up.

**Be a good role model regarding drug and alcohol use.** Evaluate your own attitudes and behaviors regarding these issues – for what they are teaching your kids. If you use or abuse drugs and alcohol, your kids will pick up on it. Do you laugh at drunken or drugged behavior when you see it shown on television or in movies? What message does this send to your kids? Be careful, you may be sending messages that you don't intend to send. Your kids *are* watching you.

**Develop a family policy on drug and alcohol use.** Be sure to include your kids in this process. Make decisions about specific behaviors and their consequences. Parents' behaviors and consequences should be included as well. Remember, this is a *family* policy. Then, be firm – maintaining these standards and consequences.

**Make sure you are affirming your kids on a regular basis.** One of the reasons kids experiment with drugs and alcohol is because of their strong desire to fit in with other adolescents and/or because of low self-esteem issues. Kids with a strong self-image are less likely to use drugs and alcohol. You can help build a healthy self-esteem in your child by giving them regular, meaningful affirmations.

*Adapted from the new book, “How to Talk to Your Kids About Drugs” by Stephen Arterburn and Jim Burns. To order this book, [click here](#).*