

Prepare to Take Action if You Suspect Teen or Young Adult Drug Use

“What do I do if my kid is using drugs?” If you’ve just discovered or have reason to believe your child is using drugs, the first thing to do is sit down and take a deep breath. We know it’s a scary time, but you’re in the right place. Before you intervene, take time to prepare yourself for the important conversation ahead, and to lay the foundation for more positive outcomes.

Talk With Your Spouse or Partner

We’re all familiar with the trick of turning to one parent when the other says no. It’s best if you and your spouse come to a common stance on drug and alcohol use before raising the subject with your child.

- Remind each other that nobody is to blame.
- Come to an agreement on the position you’ll take.
- Even if you disagree, commit to presenting a united front.
- Pledge not to undermine or bad-talk each other.
- Remind each other to come from a place of love when talking to your son or daughter.

Prepare to Be Called a Hypocrite

You're likely to be asked whether or not you've done drugs, and there are ways to answer honestly that keep the emphasis less on you, and more on what you want for your son or daughter. You could explain that you tried drugs in order to fit in, only to discover that's never a good reason to do anything. Or you can focus on the fact that drugs affect everyone differently, and just because your life wasn't harmed by drug use, you've seen it happen to too many others.

Don't let your response become a justification for your child's drug use. Focus on the issue at hand – that you don't want your son or daughter drinking or using drugs.

- Be honest – but be sure they know you don't want them using.
- If you use tobacco and your child calls you on this, mention that you are an adult, and yes, you can do this since it's legal – but you understand that you shouldn't and it's not healthy. Underscore how hard it is to stop as an adult and that you want to help your child to avoid making the same mistakes.
- If you're in recovery, think of your past experiences as a gift you can use to impact your child. Tell your child, "I did these things but I made wrong choices, and I want you to learn the lessons from my mistakes."

How to Talk to Your Kids About Drugs if You Did Drugs

You can do this, and we can help. You may even be able to use past experience to your advantage.

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Gather Any Evidence

It's understandable to have some reservations about snooping in your child's room or through their belongings, but remember, your primary responsibility is to their well-being. As you gather evidence, try to anticipate different ways they might deny using, like the excuse "I'm holding it for someone else." Even if you don't have an airtight case, you'll be better prepared for the important conversation to come.

Common hiding places include:

- Dresser drawers, beneath or between clothes
- Desk drawers
- Small boxes – jewelry, pencil, etc.
- Backpacks/duffle bags
- Under a bed
- In a plant, buried in the dirt
- Between books on a bookshelf
- In books with pages cut out
- Makeup cases – inside fake lipstick tubes or compacts
- Under a loose plank in floor boards
- In fake soda bottles with false bottoms
- Inside over-the-counter medicine containers (Tylenol, Advil, etc)
- Inside empty candy bags such as M&Ms or Skittles

Expect anger, and resolve to remain calm

If you think the conversation will be uncomfortable for you, imagine how uncomfortable it will make your son or daughter. Be prepared for them to say things to shock you, deny even the most convincing evidence, accuse you of distrust, and worse. Think about how you'll handle an angry or resentful reaction from your child.

- Resolve to remain calm, no matter what your child says.
- Try not to be baited into responding with anger of your own.
- If the conversation gets heated, end it and bring it up later.
- If you find the discussion is too emotional and not productive, figure out what you need to do to keep things calm before restarting the conversation. If you're struggling, talk to a counselor to help you find de-escalation techniques that are effective and work naturally for you.
- Don't forget to tell your child that you love him or her, and this is why you're concerned.

Set a Realistic Goal

Things will go more smoothly if you have a desired outcome in mind. It's OK – and probably for the best – to keep expectations low. It may be unrealistic to expect your child to admit to use and pledge to stop. A more reasonable objective, like simply expressing that you don't want him or her to use, can be a win.

- Try not to have unrealistic expectation, especially if this is your first conversation.
- Keep in mind that your child will probably not admit to using drugs or alcohol right off the bat.
- Set a small goal and move toward it, one step at a time.

Spell Out Rules and Consequences

Before the conversation starts, think through which rules you would like to put in place, and what the consequences of breaking them will be. This can help clarify the goal of your conversation, and help you set a clear next step. For more tips, see [advice on setting limits](#).

- Have an idea of the rules and consequences you'd like to set going in.

- Listen to your teen’s feedback and let him help negotiate rules and consequences.
- Be sure your spouse knows about and is prepared to enforce these rules.
- Don’t set rules you will have no way of enforcing.

Recognize Any Addiction in the Family

Don’t deny addiction in your family. Use it as a way to talk to your child and regularly remind him or her of their elevated risk. Drug and alcohol dependence can happen to anyone. But if there is a history of addiction – cocaine, alcohol, nicotine, etc. – in your family, your child has a much greater risk of developing an addiction.

Explain that while they may be tempted to try drugs, the odds aren’t in their favor. Their genes make them more vulnerable to developing a dependence or addiction.

Note free kit

Download your free guide to speaking up

You can never be too safe or speak up too soon – even if you think they’re just “experimenting.” Download the **Intervention eBook**, our comprehensive guide to taking the first important steps to address your child’s drinking or drug use.

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