

Talking with your children about drugs

When is the best time to talk to your children about alcohol or other drug use?

Talking with young people about alcohol and other drugs is not always easy, but just as with any other health related topic, having this discussion can make an important difference.

As a parent you can have a significant influence on your child's attitudes and decisions about drug use. It is important to open this kind of dialogue with your children from an early age since your influence on their attitudes and decisions about drugs is greatest before they are exposed to drugs or to people who might use them.

Giving your children accurate, age-appropriate information about alcohol and other drugs and talking openly on this topic, lets your children know that you are happy to have conversations about a range of subjects, including the ones that might seem harder to talk about. This can reassure them that no questions or issues are off limits.

While most young people will not have problems with alcohol or other drugs, providing a supportive family environment where issues of concern can be raised and talked through, fosters resilience and can reduce the risk of problems arising.

Establishing a pattern of open discussion also reassures young people that you will be there for them even if they do end up in a difficult situation.

When talking with your children about drugs

- Get your facts right! Accurate information can be found on the Drug Aware or Australian Drug Foundation websites.
- Look for opportunities – use television or media reports as an opportunity to talk about drugs. Side-by-side conversations with your children are usually easier so when you're travelling in the car together, use this time to have a talk.
- Ask your children for their thoughts and views, attitudes and beliefs around drugs, and share your views too. If you don't use drugs, explain to your children why you have made this decision.
- Provide fair and consistent guidelines - reach an agreement about what are acceptable guidelines in terms of behaviour around alcohol and drugs. Agree on consequences if these guidelines are broken. Agree on measures to help your child stay safer in situations where they may be exposed to drugs or others using them.
- Listen to what your child has to say and be non-judgemental. They will raise important questions for which they are seeking answers.
- Try not to interrupt. Use open questions. This will prevent a conversation from feeling like an interrogation.
- Point out the harms. Make your children aware that any drug has the potential to cause harm, even over-the-counter or prescription medication when not used responsibly. Help your children understand the importance of seeking out accurate information so that together you can dispel any myths about drugs.
- Talk about the effects of drugs on the body and the developing brain – even if they don't drink alcohol or use other drugs. Help your children understand that using drugs can interfere with, or might make it harder for them to achieve some of their future goals.
- Help them to develop ways of refusing or avoiding drug-related situations. Having a couple of 'comebacks' can be handy for your children to refuse their friends' offers of alcohol or other drugs. Set up role-play situations where your children can rehearse using these. For example - I'll be grounded for a year. No thanks!
- Have a plan for your children so they know what to do if they, or a friend, get into difficulty after drinking alcohol or using other drugs or in case of emergency. Show your children how to place someone in the recovery position. Explain why it is important for them to call for help and that, even though some young people think calling an ambulance means the police will arrive too, this is not the case. The police will only attend if paramedics feel threatened or if someone dies at the scene. You might like to book into a St John Ambulance first aid course with your children.
- Keep talking with your children so that they feel comfortable to talk to you about the things they are worried about.

For more information

For information on resources and support services in your area that can help if you think your child may have a drug use issue, call the Alcohol and Drug Support Line or your local Community Alcohol and Drug Service, or talk with your doctor. Click on the Who can help? tab on the SDERA website for contact details and options.

Contact SDERA

T: (08) 9402 6415

F: (08) 9402 6399

W: www.sdera.wa.edu.au

E: sdera.co@education.wa.edu.au

Parent and Family Drug Support Line

24/7 free and confidential counselling, information and referral

T: (08) 9442 5050

T: 1800 653 203 (country callers)

E: alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au

Alcohol and Drug Support Line

24/7 free and confidential counselling, information and referral

T: (08) 9442 5000

T: 1800 198 024 (country callers)

E: alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au

Meth Helpline

24/7 free and confidential counselling, information and referral

T: 1800 874 878

E: alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au

W: alcoholdrugsupport.mhc.wa.gov.au

