

Communicating with Your Child

WHEN YOU SUSPECT SUBSTANCE USE

Starting a conversation with your child about his or her drug use is not an easy thing to do, but is an important step in helping your child. Below are some tips for having a successful conversation.

Responses you might hear from your child:

- ☑ "I would never do that!"
- ☑ "I can't believe you are accusing me!"
- ☑ "You never believe me."
- ☑ "I've just tried it a couple times."
- ☑ "It's not that big of a deal."
- ☑ "I bet you tried it when you were younger."

If your child is struggling with talking to you, allow them some alternatives such as writing a letter or having a third person to mediate the conversation. This ensures your child has a chance to be heard.

Let your child know you are concerned.

Express your specific concerns and why you have these concerns. Let your child know you are disappointed in their behavior and don't think they are a bad person.

Speak in a calm and relaxed voice.

This can prevent your child from shutting down or becoming reactive. It's hard to fight with – or storm off from – a calm person.

Understand that your child may say hurtful things.

Don't take it personally. Actively listen to what they have to say and react thoughtfully. Continue to reinforce that drug and alcohol use is serious and you are concerned for their health and safety.

Show love and be positive.

Give positive feedback where appropriate, youth need to hear the "good stuff" just like the rest of us. If they are honest with you, praise their honesty.

Consider granting immunity.

Some young people get caught in a web of lies and can't or don't know how to get out. You can sometimes help by offering a chance to clear the record. Tell your child that if they tell the truth there will be no immediate consequences but they will be expected to conduct themselves differently in the future. If he/she doesn't, they will be held accountable.

Set consequences.

Be ready to follow through with these consequences if negative behavior continues.

Allow for a “cool down” time.

Resume the conversation at a later time. It is important to come back to the conversation to ensure your child knows the importance of the issue. If conversations are left unfinished, your child may learn how to avoid future conversations.

Have family meetings.

Get input from each family member on rules, curfews, and the consequences of breaking rules. Youth most often feel empowered if they feel heard, so it is important they are included in this process. Also, this presents a good opportunity to teach compromise and can decrease arguments when consequences that have been agreed upon are enforced.

Ask a doctor, mental health professional, or a professional substance abuse counselor for help if you are worried about your child's health and safety.

Excerpts from: "How to Break Through Barriers." The Partnership for a Drug-Free America. Purdue Pharma L.P., 2012. Web. 23 Apr. 2012. <http://timetoact.drugfree.org/know-start-talking-break-through-barriers.html>

Excerpts from: "Have a Conversation Not a Confrontation." The Partnership for a Drug-Free America. PurduePharma L.P., 2012. Web. 23 Apr. 2012

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