

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: RED RIBBON WEEK AT HOME

A PARENTS GUIDE TO DINNER TABLE CONVERSATION



7-12 GRADE STUDENTS

One of the most effective drug prevention tactics for preteens/teenagers is active engagement with their parents or support providers. By allowing your home to be a safe space for your student, you are fostering trust and encouraging open communication within your family. Reflecting the concepts your child is learning in their MUSD classroom during Red Ribbon Week, you may use the following questions to prompt a healthy, open dialogue or dinner table conversation.

Q: Have you been in situations where there were opportunities for drug or alcohol use? Did you feel pressured? Why or why not?



Let your child share a few stories, then guide them to think about peer pressure. Would they judge someone who says “no” to alcohol and drugs negatively? They will likely say they respect others’ choices, yet they still fear being judged themselves. This contrast is a great place to focus the conversation.

Q: Imagine that it's 25 years from now and you have a teenage son or daughter exactly the same age as you are now. What would you say to him or her about drinking and drugs?



You may receive a surprising range of answers to this question, but it will likely provoke an interesting discussion. Ask your child to consider the choices about drugs and alcohol they would want a younger sibling or cousin to make. Are they different from the choices they make themselves or they intend to make themselves? Encourage your child to account for the difference. If they want the best for others, why not for themselves?

Q: When you feel down, stressed, lonely or bored, what do you do to feel better? Sometimes people “medicate” with drugs or alcohol to avoid difficult feelings. What are some healthier options?



Your child should be able to come up with a list – everything from “Facetime a friend” to “go out for ice cream.” Afterwards, type up and print their list of suggestions and place it on your fridge.

Q: Have you ever seen anyone using alcohol or drugs make a fool of themselves? What happened? How would you feel if it were you?



Your child will likely be excited to recount the time their uncle fell into the pool after one too many. The tricky part here is reining in the silliness and helping them understand that it's a lot less funny when the Snapchat video stars your own humiliation. Follow up with "How would you feel if that was you? How can you avoid making decisions you regret the next day or maybe even forever?"

Q: What can you do to have a good time and to feel a rush of excitement other than doing drugs or drinking?



Push your child to think beyond just movies and concerts. How about indoor rock climbing, mountain biking, playing music, learning to cook, volunteering, filmmaking, cartooning, science experiments, political activism, fundraising, bodybuilding or camping? Your goal is to get your child to understand that they can be themselves, have great friends and a great time without drinking and doing drugs.

Q: It's Friday night and you've been looking forward to hanging out with your friends all week. While you're at the bowling alley, you notice your friend is smoking a joint in the bathroom. What are your options? What would you do?



Your child will likely know that calling you to pick them up is the accepted answer. If they don't want to do that, discuss other options – Finding a different ride home, calling a sibling or another adult they trust. This is a crucial opportunity to discuss the importance of thinking ahead and anticipating possible outcomes. What can they do to avoid these kinds of situations in the first place?

Q: You are at a concert, and someone offers you a pill to “enhance the experience.” If you were to take it, what are some of the possible consequences? If you chose not to take it, what would happen?



Encourage your child to list all the possible things that could happen after each choice and discuss these lists together. No doubt, one list will be far longer than the other. There are many negative consequences to taking a drug that they know nothing about. This is a key moment to talk to your child about impulse control and the teenage brain. A teen’s brain is primed to take risks – this means your teenaged child needs to be extra aware as they make decisions.

Q: Name two things you would like to accomplish by the time you graduate high school. How could drugs and alcohol use get in the way of those goals?



For this question, ask your child to share their goals, and then list ways drugs and alcohol could interfere with them. If their goal is, for example, playing college football, marijuana use could affect their physical and mental performance on the field, lower their qualifying grades or even get them thrown off the team. Encourage your child to see that possible temporary fun of drinking and drugs can come with dangerous risks and unwanted consequences both short- and long-term.