PARENT TALK KIT

Tips for Talking and What to Say to Prevent Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Partnership™ for Drug-Free Kids

THE MEDICINE ABUSE PROJECT®

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How to Say It

Open, honest conversations are some of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids. But when tackling some of life's tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you start the conversation with your child — and keep it going throughout his or her life.

PRESCHOOL

Scenario: Giving your child a daily vitamin.

What to Say: Vitamins help your body grow. You need to take them every day so that you'll grow up big and strong like Mommy and Daddy — but you should only take what I give you. Too many vitamins can hurt your body and make you sick.

Scenario: Your kids are curious about prescription medicine bottles around the house.

What to Say: You should only take prescription medicine that has your name on it or that your doctor has chosen just for you. If you take prescription medicine that belongs to somebody else, it could be dangerous and make you sick.

Scenario: Your child sees an adult smoking and, since you've talked about the dangers of smoking, is confused. (Parenting expert Jen Singer says the same script applies to grade-schoolers.)

What to Say: Grownups can make their own decisions and sometimes those decisions aren't the best for their bodies. Sometimes, when someone starts smoking, his or her body feels like it has to have cigarettes — even though it's not healthy. And that makes it harder for him or her to quit.

GRADE SCHOOL

Scenario: Your child tells you he was offered prescription medicine by a classmate— but said no.

What to Say: After praising your child for making a good choice and telling you about it, let him know that in the future, he can always blame you to get out of a bad situation. Say, "If you're ever offered drugs — or someone else's medicine — at school, tell that person, 'My mother would kill me if I took that and then she wouldn't let me play baseball.'" And then you'll want to follow up with the other parent and/or school.

Scenario: Your grade-schooler comes home reeking of cigarette smoke.

What to Say: I know you're curious and you wanted to see what smoking was like, but as you can see, it's pretty disgusting and it probably made you cough and gag a lot. It's important for you to know that smoking cigarettes is very unhealthy for your body. I love you and am concerned about your well-being and health and I don't want you smoking. Let's talk about why you decided to smoke. If there are any related issues – or anything on your mind, let's talk about it. I'm here to listen and help you.

Scenario: Your child has expressed curiosity about the pills she sees you take every day — and the other bottles in the medicine cabinet.

What to Say: Just because it's in a family's medicine cabinet doesn't mean that it is safe for you to take. Even if your friends say it's okay, say, "No, my parents won't let me take something that doesn't have my name on the bottle." (Keep in mind that the medicine cabinet isn't the safest place to keep your medicine. Learn the best ways to safeguard medicine: (http://medicineabuseproject.org/what-you-can-do/safeguard-your-home).

Scenario: One in 7 teens in America has tried huffing — inhaling the fumes from everyday items like nail polish remover, hair spray and cooking spray. Talk to your child about the dangers of the products under the kitchen sink — it's important to reiterate the warning.

What to Say: I know it's been a while since I talked to you about the dangers of cleaning products and that they should only be used for cleaning. But I've heard that some kids are using them to get high. I just want to let you know that even if your friends say, "Hey, we can get this stuff at the supermarket so it's totally okay to sniff it," it's not. Inhaling fumes from cleaners or products like cooking spray and nail polish remover is as dangerous as abusing medicine and street drugs, like marijuana. Now, situation if that happens. What do you think you should say? Remember, you can always blame me and say, "My mom's expecting me to be home now, gotta go!" or "My mom would kill me if I tried that!" or simply, "No thanks, I'm not interested."

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Scenario: Your child is just starting middle school and you know that eventually, he will be offered drugs and alcohol.

What to Say: There are a lot of changes ahead of you in middle school. I know we talked about drinking and drugs when you were younger, but now is when there's probably going to be an issue. I'm guessing you'll at least hear about kids who are experimenting or find yourself some place where kids are doing stuff that is risky. I just want you to remember that I'm here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the things you hear or see. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?

Scenario: You find out that kids are selling prescription medicine at your child's school. Your child hasn't mentioned it and you want to start a conversation about it.

What to Say: Hey, you probably know that parents talk to each other and find things out about what's going on at school... I heard there are kids selling pills — prescription medicine that either they are taking or someone in their family takes. Have you heard about kids doing this?

Scenario: Your child's favorite celebrity — the one he or she really looks up to — has been named in a drug scandal.

What to Say: I think it must be really difficult to live a celebrity life and stay away from drugs and alcohol. They're probably under a lot of pressure — always being in the public eye, being watched and having to do well — and, unfortunately, some make the wrong choices and turn to drugs and alcohol. But a lot of famous people manage to stay clean — like [name others who don't do drugs] — and hopefully this incident is going to help [name of celebrity] straighten out his or her life. Of course, people make mistakes — the real measure of a person is how accountable he is when he messes up. The thing is, when a person uses drugs and alcohol — especially a young person because he's still growing — it changes how his brain works and makes him do really stupid things. Most people who use drugs and alcohol need a lot of help to get better. I hope [name] has a good doctor and friends and family members to help him/her.

HIGH SCHOOL

Scenario: Your teen is starting high school — and you want to remind him that he doesn't have to give in to peer pressure to drink or use drugs.

What to Say: You must be so excited about starting high school. It's going to be a ton of fun, and we want you to have a great time. But we also know there's going to be some pressure to start drinking, abusing medicine, smoking pot or taking other drugs. A lot of people feel like this is just what high-school kids do. But, it's not what you have to do. Not all high school kids drink or use drugs! Many don't, which means it won't make you weird to choose not to drink or use drugs, either.

You can still have a lot of fun if you don't drink or use drugs. It is important to seek out these other kids who are making good choices, and be brave about trying new activities or making new friends. You'll have a lot of decisions to make about what you want to do in high school and you might even make some mistakes. Just know that you can talk to us about anything, anytime — even if you DO

make a mistake or feel stuck in a situation that you need help to get out of. We won't freak out. We'll figure out a way to help you. We want you to count on us to help you make smart decisions and stay safe, okay?

Scenario: Every time you ask your teen how his day was, you get a mumbled "Whatever, it was okay" in return.

What to Say: Skip asking general questions like, "How's school?" or questions that only need a... yes/no answer. Instead, ask more specific questions on topics that interest both you and your teen ("Tell me about the pep rally yesterday." "What are the cliques like in your school?" "Fill me in on your Chemistry lab test.")

You can also use humor and even some gentle sarcasm, to get the conversation flowing by making your child laugh and start opening up a bit. To show your teen that you want to know what it's like in his or high school, try this with an exaggerated playful and light tone, "If I call the principal and ask for a behind-the-scenes pass, I can tag-along with you to class and know what a day-in-your-life is really like." or "I hope MTV does a reality-show on your high school so I could see what it's really like for you every day." It can also be helpful to share a brief anecdote revealing something about your day to model opening up, and let your teen experience how it feels good to connect.

Scenario: Your high schooler comes home smelling of alcohol or cigarette smoke for the first time.

What to Say: "The response should be measured, quiet and serious — not yelling, shouting or overly emotional," says parenting expert and author Marybeth Hicks. "Your child should realize that this isn't just a frustrating moment like when he doesn't do a chore you asked for; it's very big, very important and very serious."

Say, "I'm really upset that you're smoking/drinking. I need to get a handle on how often this has been happening and what your experiences have been so far. I get that you're worried about being in trouble, but the worst part of that moment is over — I know that you're experimenting. I love you and care about you. Your health and well-being are very important to me. Let's talk about this. I need you to be honest with me. So for starters, tell me about what happened tonight..."

Scenario: Your teen has started to hang out with kids you don't know — and dropped his old friends.

What to Say: It seems like you are hanging with a different crowd than you have in the past. Is something up with your usual friends? Is there a problem with [old friends' names] or are you just branching out and meeting some new kids? Tell me about your new friends. What are they like? What do they like to do? What do you like about them?

YOUNG ADULTS (18-25)

Scenario: Your adult child is moving to her own apartment or into a college dorm.

What to Say: I know you're off to start your own life, but please know that I'm always here for you. I respect that you're old enough to make your own choices, but if you ever want another perspective on things, please reach out to me. I'll try my hardest to help you out without judging you for your decisions. Sound good?

Amelia M. Arria, PhD, Associate Professor in the Department of Behavioral and Community Health and the Director of the Center on Young Adult Health and Development at the University of Maryland School of Public Health also suggests saying, "There are certain things that you can count on in life and one of the things you're going to be able to count on is me. As your parent, I am always here for you. Remember, I am your support. I'm the one who can guide you."

Scenario: After watching a movie portraying drug use together, you want to gauge your adult child's opinion on drugs.

What to Say: I know you're going to think that I'm overprotective or meddling, but that movie really disturbed me and I just have to ask: Is there a lot of drug use at your college/in your new town? Do the new friends that you've made dabble in drugs at all? How do you feel about it?

Script coaching was provided by parenting experts Jen Singer, author of You're a Good Mom (and Your Kids Aren't So Bad Either), Marybeth Hicks, author of Bringing Up Geeks: How to Protect Your Kid's Childhood in a Grow-Up-Too-Fast World and Amelia Arria, Ph.D., senior research scientist, Treatment Research Institute.

What to Say: Teen Abuse of Prescription Drugs and Over-The-Counter Cough Medicine Scenarios

In addition to talking with your child about the dangers of street drugs and alcohol, it's essential that you also address the abuse of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) cough drugs. The following scripts will help you address various scenarios and explain to your teen the risks of abusing Rx drugs and OTC cough medicine — and the severity of taking someone else's medicine.

1. Abusing Rx Stimulants for Better Grades

The Situation: Your daughter returns home from her first semester of college and confesses that she used a prescription stimulant typically used to treat ADHD. She says she bought it from a friend to focus and power through long nights of stressful studying. After you express concern about her abusing prescription medicine, she retorts that the stimulant's effectiveness is unquestionable, since she got all A's this semester, and says, "Everybody uses stimulants to study!"

What to Say: Acknowledge that you are proud of her outstanding grades, but assure her that you believe it was her hard work and intelligence that earned them – not her use of stimulants. In fact, using a drug to enhance the performance of any kid (whether it's illegal steroids in sports or a prescription medicine for school) is cheating and research has shown it is actually tied to lower grades. Be sure to let her know that you understand how stressful and time-consuming it can be to go to school while trying to balance a social life, jobs, internships, etc., but stress that you are more concerned over her physical and mental well-being than her grades.

Inform her that stimulants are intended for those with medical conditions like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and it can be dangerous to her because she took them without a doctor's prescription. Just because she thinks other students are using stimulants does not mean that it is acceptable or safe for her. Side effects of abusing stimulants include vomiting, tremors, increased heart and respiratory rates and cardiovascular collapse. Brainstorm coping, relaxation and time-management skills she could try to help next semester.

2. OTC Cough Medicine Binge

The Situation: While putting away your son's laundry, you notice five bottles of over-the-counter cough medicine in his dresser. When you confront him, he admits that he drinks cough syrup in excess to get high alone in his room. He tells you that he has friends buy the bottles for him on different days of the week so that he can bypass pharmaceutical regulations. While you cannot fathom why he abuses over-the-counter cough medicine of all things, he explains that it is not only cheap, but also gives an "indescribable" high and places him in a new world where "everything is altered."

What to Say: Try to acknowledge and appreciate his honesty before losing your cool. Ask questions and try to understand why your son wants to get high; perhaps the reason isn't as nonchalant as he makes it sound. After hearing him out, explain that just because a cough medicine is sold over-the-counter does not mean it's safe to consume in excess — abuse of over-the-counter cough medicine can be just as dangerous as abusing prescription medicine and street drugs.

Abusing over-the-counter cough medicine can cause dizziness, double or blurred vision, slurred speech, abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, rapid heartbeat, drowsiness, and even a coma or death when consumed.

Please seek professional help for your son. You can call our Parents Toll-Free Helpline 1-855-DRUG-FREE (1-855-378-4373) to speak to a parent specialist and visit www.drugfree.org/get-help for more information and support.

Learn more about teen over-the-counter cough medicine abuse > (http://www.drugfree.org/resources/)

3. Painkillers After Sports Injury

The Situation: A few weeks ago, your son suffered a painful sports injury. The doctor prescribed painkillers to ease his agony, but you notice your son's supply of prescription medicine dwindling way too quickly. When you ask him why he has so little medicine left, he says that he's been taking more than prescribed because the pain is unbearable.

What to Say: Be sure to listen and understand the extent of your son's pain before diving into the issue of prescription medicine abuse. It is often the case that the abuse of painkillers by athletes starts off innocently — they genuinely do try to tame the pain. Emphasize the point that prescription painkillers can be dangerous due their highly-addictive nature and that he ne needs to closely follow the doctor's specific instructions about his dosage.

You should then tell him that taking more than prescribed is dangerous because not only can he become addicted, but he can face short-term effects like vomiting and respiratory depression or long-term effects like building up a tolerance where the medicine doesn't help anymore — which can lead many abusers to overdose. Tell him that you will schedule another appointment with his doctor to be sure his pain is addressed right away.

Also, be aware that there is also a chance that your son might be sharing his medicine with his friends.

That's why it is important to manage the supply of these types of medications and be aware of the risk of abuse by your teen or others. Be sure to monitor and safeguard your son's prescription medicine and get him the help he needs.

4. Being Challenged on Your Own Rx Use

The Situation: You discover that your daughter has been taking a depressant not prescribed to her. When you ask her about it she says it's because she works herself into a breathtaking frenzy whenever she is stressed and it helps her relax. She says she is getting the pills from the family medicine cabinet. When you ask her why she took pills without a prescription, she calls you a hypocrite because you occasionally take a pill or two from an old prescription to "calm your nerves."

What to Say: Whenever a child confronts her parent about his/her own drug or prescription medicine use, the conversation can quickly grow awkward and tense, with the parent stammering, making excuses or getting defensive. While you don't have to tell your child every detail, be open with her. Admit that you have misused prescription medicine, that it was wrong and you regret it. And let her know that you don't want her making the same mistakes. It's important to emphasize that this is about her, not about you.

Try to understand why she felt she needed the prescription medicine and how you can help her manage her stress in a healthier way. [Examples: exercise, relaxation techniques, breaking a large task into smaller, more attainable tasks, taking breaks from stressful situations, listening to music or reaching out to a friend.]

If she pushes the hypocrisy point, cite a bit of science. Scientists believe that it takes about 25 years for the brain to fully develop. Explain that her brain is vulnerable to unhealthy influences like the abuse of Rx drug and OTC cough medicine, street drugs and alcohol. If your daughter is feeling anxious and overly stressed, a consultation with a child and adolescent psychiatrist or qualified mental health professional may be helpful. There are many techniques such as relaxation and cognitive-behavioral skills training that have been proven to help people feel better.

5. Illegal vs. Legal Drugs

The Situation: You hear rumors from another mom that there was drug use at a recent high-school party your son attended. When you confront your son, he tells you that other kids were taking "hard-core" drugs like cocaine and heroin and he "only" took someone else's prescription medicine. He doesn't believe that prescription medicine and illegal street drugs have the same level of danger.

What to Say: Begin the conversation by letting your son know that you appreciate his honesty and you're glad that he feels he can talk to you. Be sure your son understands that simply because prescription medicine is legal it does not mean it is always safe — and that prescription medicine is only legal for the person for whom it's prescribed. Abuse of prescription and over-the-counter cough medicines can be just as addictive and dangerous (even fatal) as the abuse of illegal street drugs. In fact, some of those "hardcore," illegal street drugs are made of the same stuff as prescription medicine. For instance, heroin and oxycodone are both opioids derived from a common root: poppy. While kids might think that taking a prescription painkiller gives the full-on euphoria of heroin without the risks, the truth is if misused or abused, prescription painkillers are very dangerous. Also, if you take someone else's prescription you may not know what the pill really is or what the strength is. A large, single dose of oxycodone can result in potentially fatal respiratory depression.

6. The Internet and Snooping

The Situation: You look at the Internet history on your family computer and notice that someone searched for information on prescription medicine and where to buy it. You suspect your daughter conducted the search. When you mention your discovery, she adamantly denies that it was her, calling you "paranoid" and "intrusive."

What to Say: Both when you initiate the conversation and respond to her defensiveness, be sure not to sound harsh or accusatory, but rather make it clear that you are coming from a place of genuine concern. Let her know that you weren't out to get her when browsing your computer's Internet history.

Rather than freaking out over your discovery, ask her if anything is bothering her and provide specific examples of questionable behavior that led you to your concerns and suspicions. State any signs of use you've noticed such as a sudden change in mood, her not spending as much time with friends or any other warning signs (http://www.drugfree.org/think-child-using/look-for-signs-and-symptoms/). Ask her if she has used anything and, if so, what she has used. By providing these concrete instances, you dismiss her accusation of "paranoia" and begin to show her that you have reasons to be worried. However, be aware that her defensiveness and counter-complaining may be red flags of her guilt.

Regardless of her feelings, you have the right to monitor her behavior and activity as her parent. You may also want to point out the danger of buying medicine online without a prescription — since there are roughly 40,000 illegal websites pushing counterfeit medicines (often with bogus ingredients that can put one's health at risk — see box). However, emphasize that it is never okay to take any kind of Rx medicine without a prescription from a doctor — whether it came from a local pharmacy or the Internet. Purchasing illegal prescription medicine from the Internet simply adds to an already dangerous health risk. Calmly explain

If you do buy medicine online, be sure it's through safe, legitimate and law-abiding online pharmacies.

- Criminals are selling unsafe medicines on the internet. At any one time there are roughly 40,000 active rogue websites pushing counterfeit or otherwise illegitimate medicines to U.S. consumers, often without requiring a doctor's evaluation in accordance with U.S. state and federal laws.

- Illegal online medicines can put your health at risk. Medicines from illegal online drug sellers are often not what patients expect. Such products have been found to contain anything from powdered concrete to antifreeze. Many people have suffered harm or died from the effects of medicines bought from illegitimate online drug sellers.

- Be smart. Avoid websites that allow you to buy a prescription medicine without a prescription, send you unsolicited emails offering cheap medicines, offer "too good to be true" discounts and offer to ship prescription medicines worldwide.

For more information, visit The Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP) at **http://safeonlinerx.com**.

that you are not trying to "ruin her life," but it is your house and your computer, and underscore that your love her and that her health and well-being is your utmost responsibility.

7. When Friends Change

The Situation: You notice your son is home more often than usual and you inquire whether everything is okay with friends at school. He tells you that some of his friends have started taking their parents' prescription medicine and that he did not want to take any, so his friends have become distant. You can tell how upset he is and you're worried that his loneliness and peer pressure may cause him to cave in.

What to Say: First, let your son know how proud you are of his decision not to accept the prescription medicine. Shower him with praise! Then discuss the problems he is having with his friends and why he feels isolated.

While you don't want to dismiss his friends as no-good misfits, let him know that sometimes people change and make poor decisions, but that doesn't mean you have to follow down their path. Emphasize that if someone is truly your friend, he or she will not pressure you into taking drugs or condemn you for not taking drugs. Real friends respect your decisions. However, as a parent you still may not want your son immersed in a crowd of kids who abuse drugs — including prescription medicine.

Use our idea-generator (http://www.drugfree.org/resources/) to help your son brainstorm activities that might interest him. Try to encourage your son to participate in new activities and clubs at school where he can meet other kids with similar interests. If he has a greater pool of kids with whom he can spend time, he is less likely to get caught up in risky behavior.

Acknowledge that making the right decision can sometimes be especially hard in the short-term because the positive impact doesn't come until later, Try inviting some of his other friends or acquaintances over to your home to actively support new relationships and celebrate his healthy choices with an immediate reward. Most of all, use this "found time" together for any shared activities you both enjoy and might have been putting off, and further strengthen your connection with your child.

Answering the Question: "Did You Do Drugs?"

For many parents, a child's "Did you ever use drugs?" question is a tough one to answer. Unless the answer is no, most parents stutter and stammer through a response and leave their kids feeling like they haven't learned anything — or, even worse, that their parents are hypocrites. Yes, it's difficult to know what to say. You want your kids to follow your rules and you don't want them to hold your history up as an example to follow — or as a tool to use against you. But the conversation doesn't have to be awkward, and you can use it to your advantage by turning it into a teachable moment.

Some parents who've used drugs in the past choose to lie about it — but they risk losing their credibility if their kids ever discover the truth. Many experts recommend that you give an honest answer — but you don't have to tell your kids every detail. As with conversations about sex, some details should remain private. Avoid giving your child more information than she asked for. And ask her a lot of questions to make sure you understand exactly why she's asking about your drug history. Limit your response to that exchange of information.

The discussion provides a great opportunity to speak openly about what tempted you to do drugs, why drugs are dangerous, and why you want your kids to avoid making the same mistakes you made.

The following are good examples of the tone you can take and wording you can use:

"I took drugs because some of my friends used them, and I thought I needed to do the same in order to fit in. In those days, people didn't know as much as they do now about all the bad things that can happen when you take drugs."

"Everyone makes mistakes and trying drugs was one of my biggest mistakes ever. I'll do anything to help you avoid making the same stupid decision that I made when I was your age."

"I started drinking when I was young and, as you can see, it's been a battle ever since. Because of my drinking, I missed a big part of growing up, and every day I have to fight with myself so it doesn't make me miss out on even more — my job, my relationships, and most importantly, my time with you. I love you too much to watch you make the same mistakes I've made."

Five Teachable Moments

Having trouble talking to your teen about the risks of drugs and alcohol? Here are five everyday examples of easy ways to bring up the topic.

1. Fictional Character

You just took your teen to a PG-13 movie in which one of the main characters drinks and smokes excessively. It's a good thing you insisted on tagging along, because now you have the opportunity to discuss the film — especially that lead character's addiction — with your teen. Did your son think the main character's drug use was cool or did he recognize that she had a problem?

2. Movie Star

Your daughter reads every magazine she's in, owns all her movies, and has her posters taped to her wall. So what happens when her magical movie star goes to rehab for the third time? When that famous face graces the cover of Us Weekly, ask your daughter why she thinks [actor or actress' name] it may be this week is such a cool person. If your daughter only cares about her expensive clothes and good looks, remind her that her role model should also be someone who drinks responsibly and either doesn't do drugs or has taken the initiative to get help for her drug problem.

3. Professional Athlete

For as long as you can remember, you've taught your daughter that "cheaters never win." Unfortunately, this holds true when her favorite athlete is in the news for taking drugs. Ask your daughter how she feels about professional athletes using illegal substances of any kind and point out how much it can hurt a person's career and reputation — especially when they get caught.

4. Classmate

You don't need a movie star to get the conversation going with your teen. Two kids in your son's school each received a DUI over the weekend — and they had other friends in their car when it happened. A lot can come out of this conversation — why drunk driving is so dangerous, the consequences of getting caught and why you never want your son to get into a car with a friend who's been using drugs or alcohol — no matter what.

5. Relative

Substance abuse issues can often hit close to home, and it's important that we're open and honest with our kids when it happens. If you can, tell them all the details about your relative who is struggling and how it impacts everyone in the family. Explain why there's a problem and how you, as a family, are going to do what you can to support one another through this tough time. If your teen isn't asking a ton of questions, that's okay — he might be feeling uncomfortable about the topic. It might help to emphasize that while addiction can wreak havoc on a person's life, it is always possible for him or her to make a recovery with the support of friends and family. (For stories of people in recovery, visit **www.drugfree.org/storiesofhope**.)

Please note that if there is a history of drug or alcohol dependence or addiction in your family, you should let your child know since he or she is at a higher risk for developing a drug or alcohol problem. There's no reason to be embarrassed or shy about discussing your own addiction problems with your kids. Discuss it in the same way you would if you had a disease like diabetes.

How To Teach Kids to Turn Down Drugs

There's no way you can shield your kids from finding out that street drugs, alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs and over-the-counter cough medicine abuse exist — but you can help your child reject offers to try them.

Before you work with your child on this issue, there's one thing you need to know: kids don't usually get drugs from strangers. They get drugs from their friends. And that's the toughest issue of all: teaching your kids that it's okay to say no to their friends — the people they look to for validation, recognition and fun. Strongly encourage your child to avoid friendships with kids who use drugs and alcohol.

A great way to help kids prepare for drug-related situations is by acting out — also known as role playing — scenarios with them. It's important to practice these scenarios with your kids before these situations really happen.

Remember, teens rarely verbally pressure or chastise each other into drinking or doing drugs. Rather, the offer is usually casual. "Peer pressure" is more internal than you probably think. For example, your child sees other teens that she wants to be friends with enjoying a drink, smoke pot or abuse a prescription medicine to get high and she feels like she wants to be part of it too. Or, she may be afraid that the other teens will think she is less cool if she doesn't join them. Try to include this dynamic when you act out scenarios with your teens.

Use the following two scenarios as a starting point, but create new ones based on your child's life and family:

Scenario #1

Your son goes to a party at his friend's house and someone has a brought a bottle of vodka or some beer. Some of the older high school guys are drinking and ask him, "You want some?" Take the role of the older teens or of your son's friends who casually offer beer or vodka to your son.

Help your child develop firm, but friendly responses. Reassure him that his friends will respect his decision not to get involved. Remind him that people are pretty focused on themselves, which leaves much less brain space for them to be concerned with what others do.

Scenario #2

Your daughter is at her friend's house with a few close pals and one of them pulls out a joint. Take the role of her friend offering it to the group.

Help your child develop firm, but friendly responses. Reassure her that her friends will respect her decision not to get involved. Remind her that people are pretty focused on themselves, which leaves much less brain space for them to be concerned with what others do.

Friends, Family and Beyond: How Other Adults Can Help

Even if you're not a parent, you can still play a significant role in a child's life. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, mentors, teachers and coaches can all help guide a child toward healthy choices at every stage of life.

For younger children, you can reinforce messages about eating healthy and staying active. And, as kids get older, your advice can help steer them toward positive decisions when they're up against tough choices.

Wondering how you can build a better relationship with the child in your life? Put the following tips to work.

Grandparents

You have a conversational leg up on most people in your grandchild's life; you have the inside scoop on what his parents were like as kids. Help take the

pressure to be perfect off of kids by telling them stories of their own parents' shortcomings when they were younger. The fact that Dad didn't make the varsity soccer team, but discovered he loved to draw soon after can be a big boost to your grandchild's own self-esteem. For more ways grandparents can better communicate with their teenage grandchildren and keep them healthy, download our free guide "The Power of Grandparents" (http://www.drugfree.org/resources/).

> **"I think it's a really essential part of children's upbringing to have other significant adults — a teacher, extended family, older siblings — that they know they can be open and be themselves with. It gives them room to be real, to have the space to really express themselves, and to develop free from any judgment or fear of punishment."**
>
> — Dr. Jane Greer, marriage and family therapist

Aunts and Uncles

As kids get older, they tend to think that their aunts and uncles are somehow just a bit cooler than their parents. After all, they usually get to stay up past bedtime at your house. The cool factor you possess can help your niece or nephew feel comfortable opening up to you. Let your niece know that unless you think she's in danger, the things she talks to you about will stay just between the two of you. The best way to find out if something is bothering a tween or teen? "Keep it simple," says family therapist Dr. Jane Greer. An easy conversation starter: "You don't seem like yourself lately. Things going okay?"

Coaches and Mentors

Since coaches and mentors typically get to know kids in performance-related activities, from sports to the school newspaper to debate team, they can notice changes in behavior and motivation. Use those changes as an opportunity to talk to the child you know and find out what's going on in his or her life. If a child seems off his game or is just acting out of sorts, pull him and ask questions like "What's going on today?" or "How come you're not paying attention?" suggests Bob Caruso, CFO of Partnership for Drug-Free Kids and a basketball coach for teens. If you're not satisfied with the answer or your concerns continue, call the primary caregivers to see if they too have noticed any changes in their child. Find out more about how to talk with your young athlete about the risks of drugs, alcohol and performance-enhancing substances at Healthy Competition (http://playhealthy.drugfree.org/).

From a Distance: Out-of-Town Relatives

You may not get to see your niece, nephew or grandchild every day, but for long-distance relatives, the conversational opportunities still abound. From the time kids are small, ask to speak to them on the phone or use a webcam or Skype, and as they grow, let them know they can always call you to talk. Once the child has a phone or email address, text or write to him/her regularly with questions about his or her life. A simple "How was school today?" or "I love when you tell me stories about things you do with your friends" shows your young relative that you want to know what's going on in his or her life. And don't forget: kids of all ages love to get mail — especially if they're too young for an email account. Let them know you're thinking about them on a regular basis by sending a note their way that says, "Have a happy week," "I'm proud of you!" or simply, "I'm thinking about you."

If You're Worried

Worried about the child in your life? Then it's important that you talk to him, says Dr. Greer. "If you are concerned that there is something going on, be very genuine and very open and say, 'Hey, how are you doing? Is everything okay? You seem a little not yourself. You seem a little low energy. Anything we can talk about?' And then you might throw out a question or two, 'How are things going

with your friends?' or 'How are things going on the dating scene?' depending on how much that niece or nephew has already shared with you."

"If the child is not ready to talk," says Greer, "continue by saying, 'Okay, I'm just going to check in and, of course, you know I'm here.' And then take the responsibility to make the phone calls, to send the emails, to stop by for the visits so that she not only hears that you're there for her but really feels that you're there for her and sees it."

But if you're truly worried and feel there's a real problem, like drug use or depression, it's better to be safe than sorry. While you want to maintain the trust you've developed with the child, his/her safety must come first. Contact his or her parent to share your concerns and see if there's any way you can help.

If you have regular interaction with a child, you'll be able to observe changes in behavior that could signify a mental health issue or problem with drugs and alcohol.

For More Information

For more about signs and symptoms of drug and alcohol use, please visit Partnership for Drug-Free Kids at www.drugfree.org.

To speak to a parent specialist in about your teen's substance abuse problem call our Parents Toll-Free Helpline at 1-855-DRUGFREE (1-855-378-4373) Monday to Friday 10am-6 pm ET.