

Talking to your middle school-aged child about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs



10 STEP
GUIDE FOR PARENTS



Talking to your middle school-aged child about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs:

A 10-STEP GUIDE FOR PARENTS

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The examples are fictional, and the photos are not intended to represent the persons in the scenarios.

STEP I:

Why you need to talk.

As a parent, you have a strong say over your children's choices. Talking to them can help them make the right decisions about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Parents are sometimes surprised to learn that setting clear rules can powerfully affect their kids' futures.

When your children go to middle school (grades 6 to 8), they face many new challenges. They want to try new things. They want to fit in. Their friends may pressure them to do things they may not feel good about.

Remember, no matter how prepared you are, the chance to talk could happen when you don't expect it. Your child could start asking questions at any time. This booklet will help you be ready to answer their questions when they ask them.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD STAY AWAY FROM ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND OTHER DRUGS:

- Talk about what they like to do and what could happen if they drink alcohol, use tobacco, or take drugs. For example, they might not do as well in sports or school. They could get into trouble at school or with the police. They could get addicted to tobacco, alcohol, or another drug and find it hard to quit.
- Talk to them about your family rules.
- Notice when your children are doing something right and congratulate them. It builds their confidence.
- Stay connected. Keep listening. Keep talking.

¹ The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS), pg. 27. 2013



“ Teens are much less likely to use substances if they have learned a lot about the risks of drug use from their parents. ”¹



Get ready to talk.

Take this quiz and check the answers with your kids. It's fun and the information will be helpful in talks with your children. You may be surprised what you can find out!

Adapted from "Keeping Youth Drug Free," Center for Substance Abuse Prevention

1. How well do you feel you know your children?

2. What are their favorite colors?

3. Who are their best friends?

4. What are the names of your kids' teachers?

5. Who are their favorite teachers?

6. Who are some of your kids' role models?

7. What do they admire about these people?

8. What are their favorite movies, TV shows, music, or radio stations?

9. What are their favorite activities or hobbies?

10. What are their dreams for the future?

STEP 3:

Be prepared to answer questions about your smoking, drinking, or medicine use.

WHAT CAN I SAY IF MY CHILDREN ASK ME IF I EVER USED DRUGS?

Your child looks up to you. You decide what you are and are not comfortable sharing. Try to stay focused on them.

SOME WAYS TO ANSWER

- “ We’re talking about you, and I want to help you to be safe. ”
- “ I’ve seen a lot of people get into trouble with alcohol and drugs, and I don’t want to see you get hurt. ”
- “ Everybody makes mistakes. I want to keep you from making a bad choice. ”

WHAT CAN I SAY OR DO IF I DRINK OR SMOKE NOW?

- “ When I started smoking, I didn’t understand how hard it would be to quit. Maybe you can help me quit. ”
- “ I’m an adult. It’s against the law to drink if you are under 21. ”



Be a good role model. Never talk about smoking, drinking, or drug use as something exciting or fun.



Know the facts before you start talking.

Your child may know more about drugs, tobacco, and alcohol than you do! Don't worry. You don't need to know everything.

HERE ARE A FEW FACTS TO GET YOU STARTED:

- Most middle school-aged kids don't use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.
- The younger children start to use alcohol or tobacco, the more likely it is that they'll suffer from abuse or dependence.
- Changes in the brain can happen when kids use alcohol.²
- Cigarettes are not the only tobacco product young people use. New, colorful, flavored, cheap little cigars have become popular and are often easier for young people to get. E-cigarettes, also as known as vape pens or e-hookah, are nicotine delivery devices that have sweet flavors and colorful packaging.
- Young people may try prescription drugs from their parents' or grandparents' home, without knowing this is illegal and dangerous.
- You may have lots of products in your home that could be used in unhealthy ways.

Find out more. Check out drug facts for parents of middle schoolers on page 22.

² National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Alcohol's Effects on the Body, www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/alcohols-effects-body

STEP 5:

Start the conversation.

Your children are listening to you — even when it looks like they aren't! What you discuss with them can help them to make healthy choices.

HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO GET YOUR KIDS TALKING TO YOU ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THEIR LIVES:

- Ask your children what's going on — about friends and what's new and fun.
- Get your children to talk about feelings, such as how they feel about school, their friends, or being a pre-teen or teen.
- Ask questions, so they know you're listening.
- Listen to your children and show them that what they say and think matters.
- Respect their answers even if you don't agree with them.

- Use what comes up on the radio or TV to start talking. For example:

“ In that show we just watched, how do you think that girl (or boy) could have avoided being around alcohol or drugs? ”

“ I realize we haven't talked about alcohol or drugs. I love you and want to be sure you're healthy, so our family needs to set some rules. ”

“ When I picked you up at school yesterday, I noticed some kids smoking. That's pretty unusual. What do you think about that? ”

“ I know most kids your age don't drink. I just want you to understand how important it is not to ride in a car with anyone who has been drinking or using drugs. Promise me you'll contact me if you need a ride — anytime. ”



“ Whenever I talk to my daughter, it seems like she tunes me out. ”

Talks can be short, but make it clear to your children what you expect from them. They need to know that you'll be checking in with them from time to time. They are listening, even if they don't let you know. Your kids will thank you, even if they don't say so for years.

STEP 6:

Make family rules and keep them.

STEPS TO CREATING RULES THAT WORK:

- Make clear rules. Rules can include when your children are expected home, what chores they have to do, etc.
- Write the rules down. Put them in a place where they can be seen.
- Consider rewards for following the rules, such as a family trip or event.
- Give every rule a punishment if broken, such as no phone calls or computer time for one week.
- Stick to the rules.
- Go over the rules as your children get older, and adapt them as they become more responsible.
- Watch your children's activities. When you know what your kids are doing, they are less likely to try substances.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS AND EXAMPLES OF IMPORTANT RULES TO SET:

- No riding in a car driven by a person who has been drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- No drinking alcohol until you are 21.
- No staying at parties where other teens are drinking or using drugs.
- No using illegal drugs, ever.
- No using tobacco, ever. No cigarettes, no cigars, no smokeless tobacco, and no e-cigarettes, e-hookah, or vape pens.
- Stay away from places where others are smoking. Secondhand smoke is dangerous and can make kids sick.

“ My daughter always balked when I set rules, but she says now it helps her make good choices about not using alcohol or drugs. ”

HERE ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT YOUR RULES:

- Talk with other parents about the rules you have set for your kids.
- Know where your children are and have a set time when your kids have to be home.
- Make a plan with your children in case they get into a situation where alcohol or other drugs are being used.

Adapted from "The Rules of the House", in Family Matters. 2002



FITTING IN AND PRESSURE FROM FRIENDS

Your coaching can help prepare your kids. You can help them build confidence by talking to them about how to say no to tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. You can suggest your kids say:

“ No thanks. Let’s go to my house and hang out. ”

“ Not now, I gotta go. ”

“ No! I’ll get grounded. ”

Help them to come up with their own ways to say no and try them out with you. They can take the lead, and you can coach them.

Encourage them to spend time with friends who choose to stay away from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Kids are less likely to use substances if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.

STEP 7:

Keep your home safer from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

HELPFUL HINTS:

- It is recommended that prescription drugs and alcohol are kept locked up.
- If you use tobacco, try to quit.
- Keep track of your prescription and over-the-counter drugs.
- Visit www.Mass.gov/DrugDropbox to find a police department where you can get rid of unused medicines right away.
- If there is not a deposit site near you, mix old medicines with kitty litter or coffee grounds and throw away in a sealed container.* Do not flush medicines down the toilet unless the label tell you that that is best.

If you smoke, your kids are more likely to smoke. For help quitting, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669; TTY 1-888-229-2182)

- Watch such things as your cleaning products, paint cans, hair spray, and nail polish remover to make sure they are not disappearing. Supervise your kids if they use these products.**

*Visit www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm for details

**For information on inhalant abuse, prevention, and safer household products, go to www.inhalantabusetraining.org.





Build your support system.

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY WHO CAN SUPPORT YOU AS YOU TALK WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND DRUGS:

- Family doctors, nurses, and faith leaders may have experience in talking to middle schoolers and parents about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- School counselors and coaches can be helpful in supporting your rules.
- Community health centers and anti-drug coalitions have information to share.

OTHER WAYS TO KEEP YOUR KIDS SAFER:

- Help your child to believe that they can set goals for the future. If college seems out of reach, visit www.fastweb.com. There you can learn about scholarship monies; many of them are based on need. Talking about financial help for college with your child can help them to set goals for getting good grades.

- Join a community underage drinking prevention coalition to help support a healthy community.
- Take a closer look at the types of tobacco and nicotine products that are being sold in stores that your children visit. Know what they are, and talk with other parents about them.

THE LAWS

Knowing some of the laws about using alcohol, tobacco, and drugs could help your middle schooler stay away from them. Some of these laws include:

- Giving or selling tobacco to anyone under 18 is illegal.
- It's illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to have alcohol.
- Using or even holding onto someone else's prescription drug is breaking the law.
- Using household products as inhalants is against state law.

STEP 9:

Watch for warning signs.

TAKE THIS QUIZ!

If you have seen some of these changes in your kids, they might be using alcohol or other drugs.

1. Have you noticed a change in mood?

2. Is your child sleeping or eating more or less than usual?

3. Does your middle schooler show less interest in school, friends, or activities?

4. Is the quality of schoolwork getting worse or is he or she skipping school?

5. Does your middle schooler have new friends you haven't met?

6. Is money missing or have objects disappeared from the house?

7. Is your child talking about parties where drugs and alcohol are being used?

8. Is your middle schooler breaking rules or acting angry?

Some of these behaviors are normal for pre-teens. But if you think your child may be using alcohol or other drugs, have a calm and supportive talk with him or her and get help. Getting help early is the key to protecting your child's health.



“ I missed the warning signs. My daughter is only 12.” ”

Request a free copy of “Alcohol and Other Drugs: Is Your Teen Using?” at 1-800-952-6637 (TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370). You can also order or download it at www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse.
(See *Alcohol and Other Drugs* section)

You can find other signs of alcohol use at <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/AlcoholOverdoseFactsheet/Overdosefact.htm>

See other resources on page 20.

STEP 10:

Get help if you need it: Resources.

HELPLINES AND HOTLINES IN MASSACHUSETTS

Youth Central Intake and Care Coordination

(YCICC): The coordinators can help you decide what will be the best choices for your family. This state-funded service also helps Massachusetts youth and families access treatment programs specifically for teens. YCICC is a project of the Institute for Health and Recovery. 1-617-661-3991 or 1-866-705-2807 (9am-5pm; Monday-Friday except holidays); TTY: 1-617-661-9051; www.healthrecovery.org

Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline:

Information and treatment referrals are provided for youth, adults, and families. 1-800-327-5050 (toll-free; 7 days a week; multi-lingual); TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370; www.helpline-online.com

Emergency Services Programs (ESP):

Services for substance abuse and/or mental health in emergencies are available for the

uninsured, MassHealth subscribers, and many insured Massachusetts residents of all ages. 1-877-382-1609; (toll-free, 24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year); TTY: 1-800-249-9949; www.masspartnership.com/member/esp.aspx

Mass 211: Information and referrals for youth (including recreational programs) and family services are offered. 2-1-1 or 1-877-211-6277 (toll-free; multi-lingual); TTY: 1-508-370-4890; www.mass211help.org

Massachusetts Smokers' Helpline: A free and confidential way to support you as you try to quit smoking by offering telephone sessions with a trained tobacco treatment specialist. 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669); Spanish 1-800-8-DÉJALO (1-800-833-5256)

Make Smoking History: Information on preventing youth tobacco use, quitting smoking, and eliminating secondhand smoke. www.makesmokinghistory.org

Massachusetts and Rhode Island Poison Control

Center: Information and hotline about inhalants and other poisons. 1-800-222-1222 (toll-free, 24 hours); TTY: 1-888-244-5313; www.maripoisoncenter.com

ADDITIONAL MASSACHUSETTS RESOURCES

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services:

Information on alcohol, other drugs, and services. Parents can look here for tips and resources. www.mass.gov/dph/bsas or www.mass.gov/parentpower

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Tobacco Cessation and Prevention Program:

Information on tobacco. www.mass.gov/dph/mtcp

Health Insurance Plans: If you are interested in trying to quit smoking, call the phone number on the back of your health insurance card to find out what medicines are covered to help you quit smoking. MassHealth covers all FDA-approved quit-smoking medicines for as many times as it takes you to quit for good.

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse:

This service offers free information on alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs as well as other health topics:

- “Choose to Keep Your Freedom”
(*English - SA1006 and Spanish - SA1007*)
- “Preventing Substance Abuse Starts at Home: Safeguarding Your Children”
(*English - SA1037 and Spanish - SA1039*)
- “Their Future Depends on You: Together We Can Prevent Prescription Drug Abuse”
(*English - SA3518 and Spanish - SA3519*)
- “The Strengthening Families Program” home use DVD includes actions based on the science of prevention. (*English and Spanish tracks - SA3516*)

For copies of these brochures and DVD or more copies of this booklet, contact 1-800-952-6637 (toll-free, multi-lingual); TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370; www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse (see Alcohol and Other Drugs section).

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT RESOURCE FOR YOUTH

The Cool Spot:

Share with your pre-teen this interactive website for young teens. www.thecoolspot.gov



FACTS FOR PARENTS ABOUT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND OTHER DRUGS

As a parent, you may want to know some of the basics as you talk to your child.

	WHAT IT IS	RISKS	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	LEGAL STATUS*
Alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booze • Juice • Beer • Wine • Cooler • Shots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to the brain • Bad decisions, increased likelihood of violent behavior, and accidents • Possibility of depression and suicide • Alcohol addiction • Injury or death from car crashes, alcohol poisoning, or overdose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol missing from bottles at home • Smell of alcohol on breath • Speech, attention, memory, coordination impairments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal to have alcohol in the United States if you are under age 21
Tobacco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smokes, butts, spit, chew, dip, e-cigarettes, vape pens, e-hookah • It can be smoked in cigarettes, cigars, mini-cigars, or chewed (smokeless tobacco). Nicotine can be vaporized and inhaled, as in e-cigarettes, vape pens, and e-hookah. Liquid nicotine comes in small bottles and can be ingested. • Tobacco companies use candy and fruit flavoring to target their products, including cigars, at kids; these products often have shiny, colorful packaging. E-cigarettes, vape pens, and e-hookah are nicotine delivery devices; they usually have sweet flavors. • Dissolvable tobacco can be tablets, breath strips, hand gel, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addiction — middle school-age brains develop an addiction to nicotine more easily and parts of the brain may never fully develop. Within days of starting to smoke, pre-teens show signs of addiction. • Bad breath, yellow teeth, tooth decay, smell on clothing, etc. • Less energy, less physical strength • Lung disease, oral cancer, loss of teeth, heart disease, cancer, stroke, asthma • E-cigarettes, vape pens, and e-hookah are not regulated by the FDA and their risks beyond the established nicotine risk have not yet been documented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cigarettes, cigars, tobacco products in shiny colorful packaging, e-cigarettes, vape pens, e-hookah, matches, lighters. You can see samples of the types of tobacco products being targeted at kids at www.MakeSmokingHistory.org/tobacco-targets-kids. • Smell of smoke in clothing, hair • Breath mint-like tins • In some cases Sweatiness, shakiness, paleness, nausea, and vomiting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal to sell or give tobacco products to youth under age 18; in some cities and towns, it is illegal to sell or give tobacco or nicotine products to anyone under the age of 21. • In some cities and towns, it is illegal to sell flavored tobacco products except in adult-only establishments.

	WHAT IT IS	RISKS	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	LEGAL STATUS*
Marijuana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pot, weed, reefer, joint, blunt, dope, grass, herb • It's dried leaves and flowers of the cannabis plant • Can be smoked using rolling papers or pipes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affects lifetime achievement • Motor vehicle accidents • Addiction • Symptoms of chronic bronchitis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cigarettes, cigars, small pipe, lighters, matches, rolling papers, bobby pins • Water pipe or bong (container filled with liquid with a small tube) • Sweet, smoky smell in air or on clothes • Red eyes, hungrier than usual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates can be found at www.mass.gov/parentpower. Click on "Learn more about Marijuana Use and Your Child".
Prescription (Rx) and Over-The-Counter Drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some are called Kpins (Klonopin, used for anxiety), Oxy or OC (OxyContin, used for pain), Vikes (Vicodin, used for pain), Skittles or Kibbles (Ritalin, used for ADHD), cold medicines, and more • Found in homes, stores, or pharmacies • Can be tablets, capsules, or syrups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More dangerous when mixed with alcohol • Loss of appetite • Fevers, confusion, or headaches • Irregular heartbeat and breathing • Addiction • Overdose, death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing medicine • Twitching, sleepiness, or sleeplessness • Change in mood • Less interest in school, activities, or friends, or new friends you haven't met yet • Eating or sleeping more or less than usual, or other puzzling changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal to purchase or use Rx drugs without a valid prescription from the doctor • Illegal to give away your own or others' prescription drugs; illegal to sell your own or others' prescription drugs • Illegal to use over-the-counter drugs in the production of illicit drugs

*This list is not exhaustive and may be subject to change. This should not be taken as legal advice.

If your child is unresponsive or can't wake up, call 911 immediately.

	WHAT IT IS	RISKS	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	LEGAL STATUS*
Inhalants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glue, kick, bang, poppers, whippets, snappers, locker room, snort, laughing gas • Can include gases, fuels, products that contain solvents, or anything in an aerosol can • Can be sniffed or “huffed” through the mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain, liver, and kidney damage • Loss of consciousness • Addiction • Death from heart failure, accidents, or suffocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sneezing, coughing, nosebleeds • Mood swings, confusion • Sores on the face or in the mouth, rash around the nose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of these products as inhalants is illegal

*This list is not exhaustive and may be subject to change. This should not be taken as legal advice.

Congratulations! You are on your way to helping your kids stay alcohol-, tobacco-, and drug-free.



LEARN MORE:

- Additional information on alcohol can be found at www.niaaa.nih.gov
- Information on additional drugs can be found at www.drugabuse.gov
- Information on other inhalants can be found at www.inhalantabusetraining.org

**Thank you for your help in keeping
Massachusetts youth healthy**

To order this and other brochures on alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, please go to www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse



**Massachusetts Tobacco
Cessation and Prevention
Program**

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