



TIPS FOR TALKING TO MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS (11-14 YEARS OLD)

- Starting middle school (or junior high) is a big step. If you began talking with your children about alcohol or other drugs at a young age, they probably know how you feel and have a good foundation of information. If you did not start earlier, this is a great time to begin.
- As with children at earlier ages, encourage your middle school-aged children to share their dreams. Ask what activities they enjoy and help them nurture those interests in positive ways, such as participating in art, music, sports, community service, and academic clubs.
- At this age, young teens start to care more about how they look. Find ways to help boost their confidence and manage stress and talk about how drugs can harm them.
- Friends become very influential at this age, so get to know your children's friends. If you drive them somewhere or carpool, for example, you can listen in to learn current issues and trends, as well as learn how your child interacts with others.
- When you meet your child's friends, let them know your rules about underage drinking, smoking/e-cigarettes, and other drug use. Get to know their parents and share with them your desire to raise a child who understands the risks of substance use.
- Discuss what they would do or say if they saw alcohol or other substance use at a party. Work with them to come up with phrases they could say if someone offered alcohol or other drugs to them, such as "No thanks, it's not my thing."
- Tell your children often that you will come get them any time if they need to leave a place where alcohol or other drugs are being used—even if it's the middle of the night. You can also decide on a "code word" they can text you if they need your help and calling is not an option.
- Your child may be on social media by this point. Emphasize the dangers of buying pills or any medicine through social media, which is where criminal drug networks are advertising deadly fake pills.
- You might have to assume the role of a teacher. For example, your child may think it is okay if they only drink alcohol but stay away from other drugs. Discuss with them the risks of using all kinds of substances, including alcohol.

For more information, go to Chapter 4 of [Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Substance Use Prevention](#).





HOW DO I TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT DRUGS? – CONVERSATION STARTERS

Some parents find it difficult to talk with their children about alcohol and other drugs. But it is important to teach them about these substances and about your expectations if they are offered drugs.

These conversations are not a one-time event. Start talking with your children when they are young; continue as they grow older and their level of interest and understanding changes. Your willingness to talk (and listen) tells them you care about what they are interested in, and it provides you with insight into their world.

DO	DON'T
Explain the dangers using language they understand.	React in anger—even if your child makes statements that shock you.
Explain why you do not want them to use the substance(s). For example, explain that substances can mess up their concentration, memory, and motor skills and can lead to poor grades.	Expect all conversations with your children to be perfect. They won't be.
Be there when your child wants to talk, no matter the time of day or night or other demands on your time.	Assume your children know how to handle temptation. Instead, educate them about risks and alternatives so they can make healthy decisions. Encourage them to practice saying no ahead of time so they're prepared.
Believe in your own power to help your child grow up without using drugs, including alcohol.	Talk without listening.
Praise your children when they deserve it. This builds their self-esteem and makes them feel good without using drugs, including alcohol.	Make stuff up. If your child asks a question you can't answer, promise to find the answer so you can learn together. Then follow up.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Talking to your children about alcohol and other drugs does not have to be hard. The following opportunities can serve as teaching moments:



If you see a young person smoking, talk about the negative effects of tobacco.



If you see an interesting news story, discuss it with your child. Ask how your child feels about situations and the potential consequences.



While watching a movie or TV show with your children, ask if they think it makes using drugs, including alcohol, look fun. Talk about what happens to those characters, or what happens in reality.



If you read, hear about, or know someone affected by substance use, remind your child almost anyone can develop a substance use disorder. Discuss the importance of treatment and supporting people in recovery from their substance use disorder.