

TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUNG ADULTS (18-21 YEARS OLD)

- At this age, your young adult may be finishing high school and facing important decisions about the rest of their life, such as whether to pursue a college degree immediately, join the workforce or military, or follow another path. This can be a stressful time for many young adults and can often lead to an increase in substance use. It can also be an exciting time when young adults may have more freedom and opportunities to meet new people and have new experiences—which may involve being offered certain substances for the first time.
- Conversations with your young adult may look significantly different as they mature and gain independence. They may not be living at home anymore, or they may be working a job with hours that keep them from seeing you often. When you do see them, look for everyday opportunities to raise the topic of substance use.
- By this point in their lives, young adults may have witnessed substance use disorders in some way, whether it's seeing a friend go through recovery, observing binge drinking in college, or having a coworker who died from a fentanyl overdose. Talk with your young adult about their experiences and how glad you are that they have chosen not to drink or use other drugs.
- If they are already in college, remind them that avoiding drugs can help them keep their studies and future career options on track. If they are already in the workforce, discuss job loss due to infractions and safety concerns.
- Young adults entering the workforce may be exposed to older coworkers who drink or use other drugs. Talk to your child about their career choices, coworkers, and workplace challenges. In these conversations, look for openings to discuss the pressure to drink and use other drugs.
- Whether they're away at college, working, or seeking another pursuit, your young adult may be making new friends, different from the childhood and high school friends they grew up with (and whose parents and values you might have known). If your child still lives nearby, encourage them to invite their friends over for a meal. If your child is away from home, take them and some of their friends out to eat the next time you visit. This can be a great way to get to know your young adult's new friends and stay connected to their life.

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.