

PARENT GUIDE

Season 5, Episode 2 – *The Science of Addiction*

(For Parents & Caregivers)

WHAT THIS EPISODE COVERS (Key Takeaways)

From the expert conversation, parents learn:

- Substance use disorder is a **chronic medical condition**, not a moral failing
- Brain development plays a major role in how substances affect young people
- Earlier exposure increases risk because the brain is still developing
- Genetics, environment, and life experiences all contribute to risk
- Prevention is about **relationships, communication, and support**, not fear
- Recovery is real, and early support makes a difference

AGES 6–9 (WITH THE EXPLAINER VIDEO)

Before Watching

Say something simple and reassuring, such as:

“This video helps explain why some things aren’t safe for growing brains and why we have family rules.”

Set a calm tone:

“You can always ask questions — you won’t get in trouble for being curious.”

Optional prompt:

- “What does your brain help you do every day?”

During Watching

Let the video lead. If helpful, gently ask:



- “What happened when someone asked for help?”
- “What was the safe choice there?”

Point out positive reinforcement moments:

- Smiles
- Shields
- Thumbs up when safe choices are made

After Watching

Ask:

- “What part stood out to you?”
- “What should kids do if someone offers them something they’re unsure about?”

Reinforce one clear message:

“Only medicine from a parent or doctor — and always ask first.”

Optional activity:

- Create a simple **Family Safety Promise**, such as:
 - “Not for kids, not anytime.”
 - “Ask a parent first.”
 - “If you’re unsure, say no and tell us.”

AGES 10–13 (USING THE IDEAS WITHOUT THE VIDEO)

Before the Conversation

Frame it as health and learning, not discipline:

“This is about how brains grow and how to protect them.”

Ask:

- “What have you heard about drugs or alcohol?”
- “What do kids your age think about it?”



During the Conversation

Discuss:

- How brains keep developing into young adulthood
- Why substances affect kids differently than adults
- How pressure or curiosity can show up at this age

Introduce a simple pause habit:

“If you’re ever unsure, pause and check in with us.”

After the Conversation

Agree on:

- Clear family rules about substances
- Regular, calm check-ins (not tied to punishment)

Reassure:

“You won’t get in trouble for being honest — we’ll figure things out together.”

AGES 13+ (TEENS)

Acknowledge maturity while staying connected:

“We trust you — and we also want to support you.”

Conversation focus:

- Substance use disorder as a medical condition
- Why delaying use matters for brain health
- How mental health, stress, and coping are connected

Be clear and calm:

“If you ever feel pressured, curious, or worried — come to us.”



Normalize help-seeking:

“Asking for help early makes things easier, not harder.”

PARENT-ONLY CONTEXT (FROM THE EPISODE)

(Do not share verbatim with kids)

From the expert discussion:

- Substance use disorder develops over time and affects the brain
- Genetics and environment both influence risk
- Stable, nurturing relationships are a key source of protection
- Open communication helps parents notice changes earlier
- Support, not shame, makes it easier for kids to ask for help

You don’t need to label this as “prevention” for your child.
Staying connected and available does much of the work.

PRACTICAL TOOLS YOU CAN USE

1. Ongoing Check-Ins

- Keep them predictable
- Stay calm and curious
- Ask open-ended questions

2. Watch for Changes

- Mood shifts
- Sleep changes
- Loss of interest in favorite activities

Trust your instincts and start a conversation early.

3. Build a Support Network



Let your child know:

“If you don’t feel comfortable talking to us, there are other adults we trust who care about you.”

CORE LINE (CONSISTENT ACROSS EPISODES)

“We don’t have to know everything — we just have to stay connected.”

Important Note for Parents and Caregivers

This parent guide is provided for **educational and informational purposes only**. It is not intended to replace medical, psychological, legal, or substance use treatment advice.

Every child and family situation is different. The strategies and suggestions shared here are meant to support thoughtful conversation and prevention-focused parenting, but they may not apply to all circumstances. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to use their own judgment and to consult qualified professionals when appropriate.

Neither the producers of *Awkward Conversations*, nor the participating organizations, hosts, or guests assume responsibility for decisions made based on this material.

If you believe a child or family member may be at risk of harm, please seek immediate professional support or contact local emergency services

