

## How do I talk to my Teen about Drugs?

Most parents would agree with the statement that children should not do drugs. But when it comes to talking to their teens about the dangers of drug use, many neglect to broach the subject. "A don't ask, don't tell" policy is often put into place, either intentionally or from not knowing how to approach teens in a straightforward and effective manner about this contentious issue.

Experts in drug abuse claim that parents are the principal influence on their teenager's attitudes towards drug use. Educating teens about drugs and the problems that accompany drug abuse will help them to develop a healthy stance on drugs and will provide them with the knowledge to make good decisions in the future.

Do you want to talk to your teens about drug use but are unsure how to start? Here is a great list from the Teen Drug Abuse Organization to help you get started:

- **Educate yourself** - Find out about the issues. Check with local schools, agencies and information services for the resources you will need. Find books at the local library. The more informed you are, the easier it will be to discuss the issues.
- **Be accessible and open-minded** - The idea is to open a dialogue. Listen to what your teens have to say. Ask questions and do not judge.
- **Be clear** - Your main message should be clearly stated - "don't use drugs" should be the core theme of your discussions.
- **Keep it relaxed** - Avoid the "We have to talk" approach. Relax and talk about it over supper or when you're driving to the mall. If you are casual, it will help your children to be more honest and willing to talk.
- **Grab opportunities** - Use teachable moments. If you have just seen a TV show or poster that discusses the issue, use this to allow the discussion to come up naturally.
- **Don't panic** - You may hear some things that you don't like. Keep the dialogue open. Try to avoid lecturing while giving your opinion and explain the reasons behind your thinking. The goal of discussing drugs with your teen is to give them a foundation for making wise decisions about drugs on their own.
- **Discuss peer pressure** - Talk about ways to say no and how to deal with the pressures to conform and fit in.
- **Practice what you preach** - Kids imitate adults. If you abuse drugs yourself, no matter what you tell your teens, your actions speak louder than words. Avoid being a hypocrite and perhaps it is time that you examine your own problem first.

The key points that you want to remember are to keep the dialogue open, continuous and honest. Ensure that your teens know that you are accessible and willing to talk about anything. The topics that are often the most uncomfortable to discuss are often the ones that should be discussed. The initial awkwardness will soon subside and you can feel secure that you have prepared your teen for making good decisions in the future.

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