



5 Mistakes Parents Make Talking With Their Kids About Drugs

Talking with your kids about drugs feels intimidating for many parents. These five common mistakes may actually backfire – but they’re easy to avoid once you learn what to do instead.

1. Using scare tactics alone

Some parents believe horror stories about drug use will work to keep their kids from trying drugs. While these tactics do work on some kids, more often than not, they undermine parents' credibility when their kids hear different information from peers and social media. Kids will hear about the fun side of substance use and will see peers using substances without any immediate catastrophic consequences. Who will they believe when they encounter conflicting information? It's more effective for parents to understand why kids do drugs (e.g., the surge in dopamine that's created) and to help their kids understand this too, and to discuss ways to say “no, thank you” when something gets offered to them.

2. Having "the talk" once rather than ongoing conversations

Treating drug education as a one-time lecture rather than an evolving dialogue misses opportunities to adapt information as kids grow and face different social pressures and situations. Ongoing dialogue is critical for staying in tune with what your kids are experiencing at school and on social media, and helping them decide how they will respond.

3. Avoiding personal experience questions

Getting flustered or refusing to answer when kids ask you about your own experiences creates an authenticity gap. Thoughtful, age-appropriate honesty (“I tried drugs and they weren’t worth it”) builds trust and credibility that you are not clueless as a parent.



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4. Not talking about drugs at all

This is the worst mistake of all. The drug landscape is very dangerous today, and your kids will be exposed to it. Deadly amounts of fentanyl are being found in vapes, marijuana, and what looks like legitimate prescription pills. Most kids feel these forms of “legal” substances are much less dangerous than illicit drugs, but they are wrong. Just one fake prescription pill can kill your child. Your kids deserve to be prepared for the exposure they will get to drugs as teenagers. Parents need to educate themselves, know how to talk with their kids about drugs, and then plan to have ongoing conversations, beginning when their kids are age 8.

5. Stigmatizing addiction or mental health issues

When parents speak about addiction or substance users in derogatory terms, it makes it harder for kids to feel safe seeking help from their parents if they or their friends develop problems. Mental health problems and drug addictions are diseases of the brain that are very difficult to treat. Creating a judgment-free zone in your home is critical if you want your kids to come to you to discuss their concerns, rather than turning to their peers and social media, where they are likely to get incorrect information.

If you would like to...

- Learn how to make your home a “safe space” for kids to talk,
- Know the facts about legal and illicit drugs, and local statistics on use,
- Get connected with like-minded parents who also want to talk with their kids about drugs, and
- Enjoy ongoing support from 4 Youth as your kids age,
...then enroll in one of our hands-on workshops at 4youth.life