

PARENT Talk



Tips for Talking to Your Teen or Young Adult About Substance Abuse

Discovering that your son or daughter could be using drugs stirs up a lot of emotion. The best way to find out what's going on, and to begin helping, is to start talking. Take a deep breath and set yourself up for success by creating a safe, open and comfortable space for to start talking with your son or daughter. As angry or frustrated as you feel, keep reminding yourself to speak and listen from a place of love, support, and concern.

- **Hold off until he or she is not under the influence.** Do not start a conversation when your child is drunk or high.
- **Get on their level, literally.** If your child is sitting, you want to be sitting as well.
- **Turn off all smartphones** and don't allow any interruptions while you're talking.
- **Set some goals.** What do you want your child to take away from the conversation? Try writing down your thoughts to review later.
- **Try to put any panic or anger aside.** If you're anxious, find a way calm yourself (take a walk, meditate) beforehand, like taking a walk or speaking with a friend for emotional support.
- **Stay calm.** Try to stay as relaxed as possible throughout the conversation.
- **Watch your voice.** You may want to scream and yell, but it's important to maintain the calm and avoid pushing your child away.
- **Body language counts.** Be careful of finger-pointing and crossed arms – try a relaxed, open posture instead.
- **Listen as much as you talk.** Be sure it's a back-and-forth, not a lecture.
- **Try not to be defensive.** Don't take criticism personally. Let it be an opportunity for further discussion.
- **Focus completely on your child.** Try to see things from his point of view. This will help you better sympathize.
- **Put yourself in your child's shoes.** How you would like to be addressed when speaking about a difficult topic?
- **Keep an open mind.** If your child is feeling judged or condemned, she is less likely to be receptive to your message.

- **Recognize when you don't have the energy to be a good listener** and agree to restart the conversation (as long as it isn't dire) at a later, better time.
- **Express how much you care.** Explain that the reason you're talking and asking questions is because you want them to be healthy and happy.
- **Let your child know you value their honesty** and are willing to listen without making judgments.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** These are questions that elicit more than just "yes" or "no."
- **Let your child know you hear them.** Reflect back on what you're hearing by rephrasing and asking for input – "Did I get everything?" – or with nonverbal cues like nodding and smiling.
- **Offer empathy and compassion.** Demonstrate understanding and show your child you get it.
- **Show your concern.** Tell your child that you're worried about them (example, "You haven't been yourself lately").
- **Clearly state any evidence you've found.** Example: "You're not showering, your grades have dropped, and I found empty beer cans in your car."
- **Give lots of praise and positive feedback.** Teens and young need to know you can still see beyond the things they've done wrong. Find the positives in a situation, no matter how hard it may seem.

If you need help...

If you need more advice, call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740, where a counselor is always available.