

# Talking With Your Children About Substance Abuse



Preventing substance abuse starts by talking to your child about alcohol and drugs at an early age. It is important to openly discuss your thoughts about these issues long before concerns arise. Children should be well aware of your feelings about drugs and alcohol, your expectations for healthy decisions, and any consequences that may result from choosing to use substances.

If you have concerns that your child may have a substance abuse issue, early intervention is critical. Here are some specific ways that you can start a conversation with your child.

- Let your child know that you are aware that substance abuse is happening in your local community. Tell them that you started thinking about him/her because you care. You can start by saying “I have noticed something (on the news, on the radio, on social media, in the neighborhood, etc.) that I want to talk with you about.” Follow up by asking them what they think about these issues.
- Ask your child if he/she thinks they have a substance abuse problem. You can ask “Should I be concerned about (specific behaviors/situations)? If so, I hope you will be honest with us, because I want to help you no matter what you say.” Emphasize that you want to support your child no matter what is said.
- Ask your child “Is everything okay? Are you okay?” It is important to be specific and use a supportive, rather than an accusatory tone. State that you have noticed some changes in their behavior. Name the behavior changes you have seen and avoid any direct accusations of drug use. There may be another source of the behavior change, such as problems in school, depression, etc.
- Be direct about how you feel. You can say “I care about you. I do not like how this is impacting the family. What can I do to make this better? How can I help you?” You could also say “You are really scaring me and I worry about you. What can I do to help you?”

If you decide that more help and guidance is necessary, there are many people in your community who can serve as great resources for you and your child. Talk to your family physician, a school counselor, professional therapist, or addiction counselor.



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