

Preventing Drug Use: Connecting and Talking with Your Teen

(from *drugfree.org*)

Further recommended reading:

Article: Guide for Parents of Addicted Children and Teens: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)
from americanaddictioncenters.org

Article: [What If A Drug Problem Has Already Developed?](#) from
FocusOnTheFamily.com

Article: [When Your Child Is on Drugs](#) from christiandrugrehab.com

Parents are the biggest influence in a teen's life. Even though you may feel your child pulling away, eager for more independence, deep down they still want you involved. A strong bond with your child, especially during the teen years, helps reduce the chances of them engaging in unhealthy behavior and helps set the stage for preventing nicotine, alcohol and drug use.

Stay involved

Staying involved and keeping tabs on teens' activities — both online and off — can be another way of demonstrating that you care and can help develop a stronger parent-teen relationship. This is especially true if you communicate the reason *why* you're interested in their actions and whereabouts. It's important to stress that it's not to be nosy or intrusive, but rather because you're interested and care about them.

Parents often find themselves between a rock and a hard place when raising teens. It's a delicate balance respecting your child's growing independence while still needing to set rules and boundaries. Finding the right balance requires effective communication, making constant adjustments and staying in touch with what's going on in their life.

Some tips to make keeping tabs a seamless part of the routine:

- Share some quality in-person time — without the distraction of electronic devices — whenever you can: during meals, a walk, while you're in the car, or simply hanging around at home together.
- Ask specific questions about their day but convey interest and curiosity, rather than making it feel like an interrogation: “Who'd you have lunch with today?”, “How was soccer practice?”, “What's planned for play rehearsal tonight?”
- When friends are over, pop in to meet them or say hello, and check in periodically.
- Talk to their friends' parents. If you don't know them yet, introduce yourself the next time there's an opportunity. You can email them, text or call to say hello.
- Ask teachers, coaches and other caring adults in your child's life how they are doing in school or with extracurricular activities.
- Connect with the school as a volunteer or in other school-sponsored activities.
- Check in on online and phone activities, especially social media, which also includes having passwords and scanning apps from time to time.

Your teen may push back, but that's no reason to back off. Help them understand that you're involved because you love and want what's best for them, not because of a lack of trust.

Find opportunities for real conversation

Keep in mind that teens say that when it comes to substances, their parents are the most important influence. That's why it's important to talk — and listen — to your teen. So, try to talk. A lot.

Discuss the negative effects of nicotine, alcohol and drugs. Clearly communicate that you do not want your teen using substances. Talk about the short- and long-term effects drugs and alcohol can have on their mental and physical health, safety and ability to make good decisions. Explain to your child that experimenting with drugs or alcohol during this time is risky for their still-developing brain.

- Look for blocks of time to talk. After dinner, before bed, before school or on the way to or from school and extracurricular activities can work well.
- Take a walk or go for a drive together. With less eye contact, your teen won't feel like they are under a microscope.

Approach your talks with openness

- Keep an open mind. If you want to have a productive conversation with your teen, try to keep an open mind and remain curious and calm. That way, your child is more likely to be receptive to what you have to say.
- Ask open-ended questions. For a more engaging conversation, you'll want to get more than just a "yes" or "no" response from your child.
- Use active listening. Let your teen know they are understood by reflecting back what you hear — either verbatim or just the sentiment. It works like this: You listen without interrupting (no matter what), then sum up what you've heard to allow them to confirm. Try these phrases:
 - "It seems like you're feeling..."
 - "I hear you say you're feeling..."
 - "Am I right that you're feeling..."
- Use "I" statements to keep the flow going. "I" statements let you express yourself without your teenager feeling judged, blamed or attacked. You describe the behavior, how you feel about it and how it affects you. Then you spell out what you need. Like this:
 - "When you don't come home on time, I worry that something terrible has happened. What I need is for you to call me as soon as you know you're going to be late so that I know you're okay."
 - "I feel like you can't hear what I have to say when you're so mad. Then I get frustrated. I need to talk about this later when we're both able to listen."
 - "Because I love you and I want to keep you safe, I worry about you going to the concert. I need to know that you will obey our rules about not drinking or using drugs."
- "I" statements allow you to use persuasion (not control or blame) to cause a change in their behavior. You also allow them to help decide what happens next — another key to bonding.

Offer empathy & support

Let your child know you understand. The teen years can be tough. Acknowledge that everyone struggles sometimes, but drugs and alcohol are not a useful or healthy way to cope with problems. Let your child know they can trust you.

Remind your child that you are there for support and guidance — and that it's important to you that they're healthy, happy and make safe choices.