

MAKING THE TALK COUNT AT EVERY AGE



One size does not fit all. This is especially true when talking about alcohol, drugs, and gambling. What you say to a 9-year-old is different from what you say to a 15-year-old.

A clear no-use message is the most effective way for parents to keep their kids safe.

REMEMBER: Children can't learn all they need to know from a single discussion – a lot of little talks are more effective than one "big talk."

Preschool



By preschool, most children have seen adults drinking alcohol, either in real life, on TV, or online. The attitudes they form at this age have an impact on the decisions they make when they are older.

At this age, they are eager to know and memorize rules, and they form their opinion on what's "good" and what's "bad" based on what they see adults do around them.

Ages 5 to 9



Children this age have an increasing interest in the world outside the family and home. Now is the best time to explain what alcohol, drug misuse, and gambling is, and the consequences. If you and your child see someone who is drunk on TV or on the street, talk about it. Explain that getting drunk is dangerous. The same goes for drug usage or gambling.

Ages 10 to 12



Kids assert their independence and question authority, but they need your input and advice more than ever.

Tweens understand the reason for rules and appreciate having limits in place. Be sure they know your rules and the consequences if they break these rules.

Talk out some real-life situations and brainstorm solutions for what they can say. For instance: "My mom (or dad) would kill me if I drank alcohol or used drugs." Give them a way out if they are in a bind by allowing them to call or text you.

Base alcohol, drug, and gambling-related messages on facts – not fear. Tweens love to learn facts about all kinds of things. Take advantage of their passion for learning to reinforce your message about alcohol, drugs, and gambling.

REMEMBER this is a tough time for your tweens. It is a time of change when they are not as confident and they feel insecure, doubtful, and vulnerable to peer pressure. During these years, give your tween lots of positive reinforcement and praise them for their efforts and successes.



Ages 13 to 18

Your teen will most likely know other kids who use alcohol, drugs, or gamble. Most teens are still willing to express their thoughts or concerns with parents about it. Use these conversations not only to understand your teen's thoughts and feelings, but also to talk about the dangers of alcohol and drugs as these can relate to violence, sex and driving under the influence. Talk about the legal issues and the possibility that they or someone else might be killed or seriously injured.

Abstinence is important, and underage drinking, drug use, or gambling should not be considered a "rite of passage" nor something "they're going to do anyway."

Teenagers tend to be idealistic and want to help make the world a better place. Explain to teens that underage drinking, drug use, or gambling is not a victimless crime, and the effects on our society. Make it clear that drinking, drug use, and gambling are not permitted under any circumstances and let your teen know that you trust them not to drink alcohol, use drugs, nor gamble.

Help your child build self-reliance by asking them how they plan to deal with situations such as being offered alcohol or drugs, or being invited to gamble. What would they say if they were invited to ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking or using drugs?

Wait for your teen to return from being out with friends so you can chat about what happened. Strive to convey love and concern not mistrust.

The first time you have evidence that your teen has been drinking, using drugs, or gambling: talk about it, don't minimize it, and don't ignore it.



Ages 18 and older

The child is no longer a child, but you still care, and your influence can make the difference. College students will encounter drinking on and off campus. Find out about a college's record of drinking-related incidents and drug abuse before your young adult enrolls. Talk about your findings with your child.

Remind your young adult about the dangers of binge drinking, alcohol poisoning, and the consequences of drug use or gambling. These conversations can help youth make good choices.

As always, stay connected with your child to learn how best to help him or her.