

PRESCRIPTION SAFETY CONVERSATION GUIDE



How to talk with your child about the dangers of Prescription Opioids and the safety measures to take in your home.

DON'T ASSUME

DON'T assume your child already knows the dangers of prescription opioid use and abuse, or that they could never fall victim. A lot of kids think that you can only become addicted if you use a lot of a substance or use it repeatedly, but for some, all it takes is a single dose. Make sure your child understands that risk, and never brush off an instance of his or her using as a fluke.

DO START THE CONVERSATION EARLY

Parents of younger children might think they have years before they really need to discuss the dangers of drugs, but in fact, it's never too early to start warning them. A good place to start is around the age of about 5; your child will be more receptive to your advice and guidance, and you can start somewhat small by discussing the safety around medications they take for colds or that they see you take for a headache. Discuss how all medicines — prescription and over-the-counter alike — come with risks and should be used with care. Let them know that for this reason, they should never take any kind of medicine without your guidance because it can be very dangerous. Don't scare him or her, but do emphasize the seriousness of the matter.

MAKE SURE TO NOTE THAT PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS CAN BE ESPECIALLY DANGEROUS.

Your child should never take medications that aren't prescribed to them. Explain that prescription drugs are much more powerful and come with more serious side effects, and that is why they require a doctor's guidance. If you or your partner has any that your child may see you take regularly, go over the side effects. Explain that your doctor had many things to consider before ultimately deciding to give you that prescription and you must take it at only a certain dosage in order to minimize the risks. Emphasize that if anyone else took your prescription, it could be extremely dangerous, and for a child, it could even be life-threatening.

DON'T BE VAGUE

Because you are an adult and have been familiar with the dangers of drugs and alcohol for many years, it's easy to forget that your child has virtually no prior knowledge on the subject. Spell things out. Let him or her know that using substances is never OK no matter what, and that there will be strict consequences for breaking that rule. It doesn't matter if their friends do it, if they see older family members do it, or if "just one pill" seems harmless. There is never an excuse for disobeying you on this matter, and if they argue you're being overly-protective, remind them that as their parent it is your duty to protect them. Keeping them safe from the dangers of drugs may not be something they can understand right now, but one day they will appreciate your zero-tolerance policy.

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Talking Tips and Conversation Starters

DO ADDRESS BROKEN RULES IMMEDIATELY

If you've caught your child in the act of using, or if you've found evidence that they've done so, don't wait to address it. Research indicates that the earlier someone experiments with drugs, the more likely he or she is to become addicted. Confront your child the moment something is awry, and punish them as you and your partner deem fit.

DON'T FORGET TO GIVE YOUR CHILD A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN, HOWEVER

Though there is no excuse that will prevent punishment, it's important that you understand what led him or her to disobey you. If they're hanging out with a toxic group of friends that persuaded them to "just try it," you need to know. If they're feeling overwhelmed with school, you need to know. If they're having a tough time adapting to a new home or living situation, you need to know. Let them know that it's perfectly OK to have a tough time, but that they need to cope in healthy, safe ways. Explain that by using drugs or alcohol to reduce stress, they're only creating new problems, and you can help them find better ways to overcome their challenges.

DO DISCUSS THE ROLE OF PEER PRESSURE

We all want to be liked, and when you're a child, there's a lot more pressure to be a certain way or do certain things. Discuss your own challenges with peer pressure, both as a child and today, and how you understand that sometimes it can be overwhelming. Explain that true confidence is being able to rise above the crowd, to be a leader instead of a follower, and anyone who attempts to tell them differently is likely envious that your child doesn't feel the need to please others. Let them know it won't always be easy to say no, but part of growing up is finding the strength to stand up for themselves. And keep things in perspective: most of their peers actually don't use drugs or alcohol.

DO STAY EDUCATED

Unfortunately, new designer drugs pop up quite regularly, so it's important that you stay up-to-date on what's out there and incorporate it into conversations with your child. You can reach out to local law enforcement offices to find out what's especially popular in your area, as well as slang terms you should be aware of. If you suspect your child is hiding drugs, learn about where the most popular hiding spots. Staying educated is an important part not only of addiction prevention for your child, it also solidifies your own credibility when discussing it.



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DO KEEP ALL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE OPEN

It's important that all discussions remain a two-way conversation. Though you certainly want to be able to give your child the facts, don't forget to ask him or her questions. What does he or she already know? Is there anything they don't completely understand about the risks? Which drugs do they deem "less dangerous" and why? Have they ever found themselves tempted to use? Just make sure you're asking questions and showing interest in your child's thoughts and feelings rather than turning it into an interrogation. You want to create a dialogue now so that anytime an issue comes up in the future, your child has no hesitations about coming to you.

DO EMPHASIZE THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

The repercussions of substance abuse range from painful withdrawal symptoms to the spread of chronic disease. It can even jeopardize your child's chance at getting into their dream university, or passing a drug test for a job they really want. Go over both the long-term and short-term consequences of addiction, but be careful not to veer into over-the-top scare tactics. Fear-based education has been shown to be ineffective, and can even backfire completely. Give your child the facts about what could happen, but don't entice them to prove you wrong by saying certain outcomes absolutely will happen.

DO CONSISTENTLY TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT HIS OR HER MENTAL HEALTH

There is a strong link between mental health issues and the tendency toward substance abuse. More than that, however, you should always be on the lookout for signs of teen or adolescent depression. Because of the changing hormonal balances children go through as they develop, it can be difficult to rely on your observations alone.

TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT HIS OR HER DAY EACH AND EVERY DAY

Ask what they did, how their schoolwork is going, and how their friends are. If it seems like there's more going on than they're letting on, let your child know that you'll always be a listening ear without judgment. Be careful not to downplay anything that's going on with them: it might be difficult to remember, but seemingly small fights with friends and other social issues can feel monumental to kids, especially teens, and the last thing that will help is being made to feel silly about it. Further, never underestimate the power of a family dinner. It's a regular opportunity to talk to your child about what's going on in his or her life, and it's even been shown to reduce their likelihood of abusing drugs or alcohol.

You may not be able to control every action your child ever takes, but you can do everything in your power to be a positive influence. Keep the doors of communication open at all times, and look for every opportunity to remind your child that you love them and want to be there for them. If your child does slip up and get busted for using drugs or alcohol, express your disappointment and assign an appropriate punishment, but remind him or her that a single mistake won't ever stop you from loving them



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The fastest-growing drug problem in the United States isn't cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamines. It is prescription drugs, and it is profoundly affecting the lives of teenagers.

According to [National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\) DrugFacts](#), prescription drug misuse and abuse is when someone takes a medication inappropriately (for example, without a prescription). Sadly, prescription drug misuse and abuse among young people is not an insignificant problem. According to National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) data on youth and young adults, more than 5,700 youth in 2014 reported using prescription pain relievers without a doctor's guidance for the first time. A common misperception is that prescription drugs are safer or less harmful to one's body than other kinds of drugs. However, there is a range of short- and long-term health consequences for each type of prescription drug used inappropriately:

- **Stimulants** have side effects in common with cocaine, and may include paranoia, dangerously high body temperatures, and an irregular heartbeat, especially if stimulants are taken in large doses or in ways other than swallowing a pill.
- **Opioids**, which act on the same parts of the brain as heroin, can cause drowsiness, nausea, constipation, and, depending on the amount taken, slowed breathing.
- **Depressants** can cause slurred speech, shallow breathing, fatigue, disorientation, lack of coordination, and seizures upon withdrawal from chronic use.
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These impacts can be particularly harmful to a developing adolescent brain and body. Our brains continue to develop until we reach our early- to mid-twenties. During adolescence, the pre-frontal cortex further develops to enable us to set priorities, formulate strategies, allocate attention, and control impulses. The outer mantle of the brain also experiences a burst of development, helping us to become more sophisticated at processing abstract information and understanding rules, laws, and codes of social conduct. Drug use impacts perception—a skill adolescent brains are actively trying to cultivate—and can fracture developing neural pathways. Additionally, as our brains are becoming hardwired during adolescence, the pathways being reinforced are the ones that stick. If those pathways include addiction, the impact may lead to life-long challenges.

As with any type of mind-altering drug, [prescription drug misuse and abuse](#) can affect judgment and inhibition, putting adolescents at heightened risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, misusing other kinds of drugs, and engaging in additional risky behaviors.

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