

TIPS FOR TALKING TO PRESCHOOLERS

Young children ask many questions. Your response lets them know you can be trusted to provide honest answers.

- Do not worry that talking about drugs will give your child ideas about using drugs or tempt them to experiment.
- The early attitudes your children form help them make healthy decisions when they are older. Talk often with preschoolers and listen to what they say.
- Young children mimic adults, so use every opportunity you can to share your feelings about substance use.
- Caution them never to take a drug unless you, a grandparent, caregiver, or medical professional like a nurse or doctor gives it to them.
- Preschoolers have short attention spans, so give short, honest answers.
- Teach your child to make their own good choices. If they love a fictional character or famous athlete, encourage them to eat healthy foods so they will grow up to be strong like their idol.
- Let them make decisions (for example, what to wear in the morning) that build confidence in their ability to do so.

For more information, go to Chapter 4 of [*Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Substance Use Prevention*](#).





HOW DO I TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT DRUGS? – CONVERSATION STARTERS

Some parents find it difficult to talk with their children about alcohol and other drugs. But it is important to teach them about these substances and about your expectations if they are offered drugs.

These conversations are not a one-time event. Start talking with your children when they are young; continue as they grow older and their level of interest and understanding changes. Your willingness to talk (and listen) tells them you care about what they are interested in, and it provides you with insight into their world.

DO	DON'T
Explain the dangers using language they understand.	React in anger—even if your child makes statements that shock you.
Explain why you do not want them to use the substance(s). For example, explain that substances can mess up their concentration, memory, and motor skills and can lead to poor grades.	Expect all conversations with your children to be perfect. They won't be.
Be there when your child wants to talk, no matter the time of day or night or other demands on your time.	Assume your children know how to handle temptation. Instead, educate them about risks and alternatives so they can make healthy decisions. Encourage them to practice saying no ahead of time so they're prepared.
Believe in your own power to help your child grow up without using drugs, including alcohol.	Talk without listening.
Praise your children when they deserve it. This builds their self-esteem and makes them feel good without using drugs, including alcohol.	Make stuff up. If your child asks a question you can't answer, promise to find the answer so you can learn together. Then follow up.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Talking to your children about alcohol and other drugs does not have to be hard. The following opportunities can serve as teaching moments:



If you see a young person smoking, talk about the negative effects of tobacco.



If you see an interesting news story, discuss it with your child. Ask how your child feels about situations and the potential consequences.



While watching a movie or TV show with your children, ask if they think it makes using drugs, including alcohol, look fun. Talk about what happens to those characters, or what happens in reality.



If you read, hear about, or know someone affected by substance use, remind your child almost anyone can develop a substance use disorder. Discuss the importance of treatment and supporting people in recovery from their substance use disorder.