

DRUG & ALCOHOL

CONVERSATION GUIDE ... for parents of older kids/teens

It's the conversation no parent wants to have, but we have to have it at some point—either before or after. Sure, the schools talk about it a lot. And there are occasional ads about it on TV and social media, but at some point, our kids need to hear their parents talk about drugs and alcohol.

Maybe you're reluctant because of some of your past decisions. But don't let that stop you. A lot of times—in many areas—we parent based on the lessons we learned from our bad decisions, even more so than the good ones we made.

Or maybe it all feels very foreign to you. It's never been an issue in your life. Addiction is too much a part of today's culture not to have a conversation about it—both to inform your kids about the dangers and to set clear expectations and boundaries.

WHAT TO SAY

STARTING THE CONVERSATION:

Set the tone of the conversation by being loving and supportive. Avoid lecturing and allow your kid to weigh in on their thoughts as much as possible. Ask or say things like:

- Why do you think people get addicted to something?
- Do any people you know use drugs or get drunk?
- Why do you think there are laws against underage drinking? Do you think the age limits are fair/right or should they be something else?
- I read an article the other day about a new study that I wanted to share with you.
- Why do you think people try drugs of any type?
- Have you ever been offered drugs?
- Have you ever been offered alcohol?
- If someone offered you drugs or alcohol and you didn't want it, what would you say?
- If you are ever in a situation that makes you feel uncomfortable, call me and I will come get you, no questions asked.
- This isn't a trap. I promise. You're not in trouble. I'm just wanting to get to know your world. Have you ever smoked pot before? If yes, how did it make you feel? If yes, why did you want to do it?
- Have you ever had alcohol before? If yes, how did it make you feel? If yes, why did you want to do it?
- One of the best decisions you can make in your life is to choose to say no.
- Let's talk about our expectations for you regarding drugs and alcohol.
- I love you too much and care too much about your future to allow you to experiment with drugs or alcohol.
- Thank you for talking about this with me. It's too important not to talk about it.

SUGGESTED NON-NEGOTIABLE (EXPECTATIONS):

Be very clear with communicating the following expectations to your son or daughter:

- Never ride in a car with someone who has drugs on them.
- Never ride in a car with someone who has been drinking or doing drugs.
- There will be NO drugs in the house.
- You will not spend time with friends who use drugs or alcohol.
- Consuming of drugs is not acceptable.
- Consuming of alcohol is not acceptable.
- Consequences: loss of privileges. mandated therapy, _____.

IF YOUR CHILD IS ALREADY USING DRUGS AND ALCOHOL:

If you find out your teen tells you they are doing drugs or using alcohol, stay calm. You don't want your teen to shut down. Your primary goal is to get to the root of the problem and help them find a solution.

- This doesn't change how I feel about you.
- I love you and I accept you no matter what. But using drugs or alcohol is not okay.
- What made you choose to start drinking or doing drugs?
- Do you think there are any underlying issues that you are trying to deal with?
- Drugs and alcohol may feel good temporarily, but they will not solve any problems.
- Is there something at home that bothers you?
- How can our family help you?
- Do your friends know you're doing this?
- Can you be honest with me about how long you've been using drugs or alcohol?
- Realistically, we will need to talk about how you can earn back trust.
- Though it may feel like an intrusion, it will be important to know that you may be drug tested randomly.
(You can purchase test kits at your local pharmacy.)
- Who else can we talk to about this situation? (Small group leader, mentor, coach)
- Let's talk about seeing a therapist or drug counselor.
- We need to set some boundaries together to help you make good decisions. Here's what that will look like for you.
(Determine what that will be regarding cell phones, driving, friends, etc.)

If your child is using drugs or alcohol, these conversations are just the beginning of a much longer process of getting treatment. It will be necessary to seek professional help from those who are licensed and specialize in the field of drug and alcohol treatment. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has a free, confidential, national helpline to provide referral sources to those who call. The number is **1-800-662-HELP**.

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