



# TALKING ABOUT DRUGS

## TALKING WITH TEENAGERS ABOUT DRUGS

Some parents and guardians may find it difficult to talk with their teenager about drugs. Between illegal drugs and prescription medications, it may be hard to know where to begin. But drugs can be dangerous, and some teenagers are not aware of the risks.

### TALKING WITH YOUR TEENAGER

As a parent or guardian, you might need to talk with your teenager about drugs because:

- > Your teenager will hear information about drugs from their friends, the media, even other adults and some of this information will be wrong.
- > Your teenager is not using drugs, but you want to educate them about the risks in case they are ever tempted to try them.
- > Your teenager may not use drugs, but they (or you) are concerned that someone they know might be.
- > You realize (or suspect) that your teenager is using drugs, and you want to help them stop.
- > Your teenager may be asking questions about drugs. Give them reasons to say no.

It is important that parents talk about drugs regularly before there is an urgent need to do so. Many short conversations are better than a few long lectures, and teenagers are more likely to pay attention during shorter chats.

### STARTING THE CONVERSATION

There is no script for talking with your teenager about drugs. But here are a few tips to keep in mind.

- > Offer them control of the situation. Let them pick the time and place.
- > Look for opportunities to talk about drug use with your teenager, like when you discuss school or current events.
- > Plan the main points you want to discuss, rather than speaking on impulse. Avoid saying everything you think all at once. Instead, target your main points about drugs.
- > Listen to them and respect their opinion. If they see you as a good listener, they may be more inclined to trust your input. Give them room to participate and ask questions.
- > Focus on facts rather than emotions. If your teenager is using drugs, you may feel anger, sadness, fear or confusion. Those are natural reactions. But talking about the issue is more productive than talking about your feelings.
- > Avoid being judgmental.
- > Respect their independence. Tell them you are trying to help them make good decisions, by giving them information they may not know.

- > Be clear about why you are worried. Whatever your teenager may think, communicate that your main concern is for their well-being.

You are your teenager's most important role model and their best defense against drug use. Start early and answer the questions about drugs before they are asked.

### TALKING ABOUT MARIJUANA

Teenagers react more positively to facts than to emotional arguments. Here are a few facts about marijuana you can share with them.

- > Today's marijuana is much stronger than marijuana from many years ago. Studies show that the average level of THC, the principal "mind-altering" component of marijuana, has increased by 300% to 400% over the last few decades.
- > Marijuana contains hundreds of substances, some of which are psychoactive and can affect the proper functioning of the brain and body.
- > Regular long-term marijuana use can harm concentration, cause loss of memory, harm the ability to think and make decisions, and decrease IQ. Some of these effects may persist after stopping marijuana use.
- > Marijuana smoke contains many of the same cancer-causing chemicals as tobacco smoke.
- > It is estimated that 1 in 9 marijuana users will develop an addiction to marijuana.

### TALKING ABOUT PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Teenagers react more positively to facts than to emotional arguments. Here are a few facts about prescription drug abuse you can share with them.

- > Some prescription drugs (opioid pain relievers, stimulants, and benzodiazepines) have psychoactive (mind-altering) properties, and for this reason they are sometimes used to get high.
- > Psychoactive pharmaceuticals are the third most commonly-abused substances, after alcohol and marijuana, among Canadian youth.
- > Prescription opioids can be just as dangerous as illegal opioid drugs such as heroin.
- > Taking prescription drugs without a doctor's approval is dangerous, and can even be fatal.
- > Prescription drugs, when used improperly or abused, are not safer than illegal drugs.
- > There are many dangerous and unpredictable effects associated with abusing prescription drugs including addiction, overdose and death.







## How to Talk with Your Teen about Drugs

Communication Tips for Parents

### Parents matter. You are your child's most important role model and their best defence against drug use.

By talking openly with your teen about drugs, you can strengthen your relationship with them. Once you have built a strong relationship, communication will be easier.

When parents and teens disagree they sometimes drift away from each other. As hard as it may be, it is very important that you keep the lines of communication open.

#### Your teen's point of view is very important.

- ▶ Most teens are happy with their relationship with their parents. However, many teens think their parents are not always there when they need them.
- ▶ As teens grow they need to be able to speak their mind. This may create conflict and during this time, you may think that your teen is not listening to you even though they really are.
- ▶ Remember that when your teen talks back and argues with you, it does not mean they are rejecting you. In fact, the opposite may actually be true. By asserting their independence, your teen is building a stronger and more positive relationship with you.
- ▶ Many teens don't want to talk just about drugs; they would also like to talk about other things such as adulthood and puberty, school issues and friendships.

Beyond a strong relationship and open communication with parents, there are other important factors that can decrease or increase the chances that teens may experiment with drugs.

*parents matter*

#### Some of the key factors that can help your teen make the right choices include:

- ▶ a strong family attachment
- ▶ positive involvement in the community
- ▶ connection at school
- ▶ religious and spiritual beliefs
- ▶ social skills
- ▶ positive friendships

*strong relationships friends*

#### Some of the key factors that can increase the chances that your child may experiment with drugs are:

- ▶ low self-esteem
- ▶ drug use by friends
- ▶ peer pressure
- ▶ conflict in families
- ▶ poor grades
- ▶ lack of connection at school

*open communication*

#### Empower your teen. Help them resist drug use by:

- ▶ nurturing their self-confidence and intelligence;
- ▶ creating a sense of hope and optimism;
- ▶ ensuring they grow up in a safe environment and are involved in extracurricular activities; and,
- ▶ making sure they have the community support that they need.

*listen*

### When talking with your teenager about drugs, here are a few tips to keep in mind.

- ▶ Think first. Act second. Try to stay clear and focused and don't get too emotional. Keep an open mind.
- ▶ Keep an eye on your teen's behaviour. Ask them everyday what they are doing and don't be afraid to set limits such as curfews.
- ▶ Encourage your teen to work with you to set boundaries, but don't be afraid to adopt a strong position when you need to.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to enforce the boundaries you have set. Let your teen know that you are setting boundaries because you care for them and want only the best for them.
- ▶ Find ways to ensure that your teen believes what you say and trusts you.
- ▶ Talk regularly and talk often. Many "mini-conversations" about drugs are better than long boring lectures.
- ▶ When talking with your teen, think about their point of view and listen respectfully to what they have to say.
- ▶ Keep the conversation positive and upbeat rather than waiting for an opportunity to criticize your teen for bad behaviour.
- ▶ Take advantage of "teachable moments" to discuss drug use with your teen. Teachable moments can happen while driving in the car, at the dinner table while discussing a situation at school or a current event in the news.
- ▶ Eat dinner together as often as possible. The family dinner provides one effective way to strengthen your communication with your teen.

*prevention*

- ▶ Help your teen develop sound reasoning skills and encourage conversations and the open exchange of ideas and feelings.
- ▶ Focus on messages about how drug use affects sports performance, health and appearance. These messages have more impact because this age group is more affected by peer pressure, doubt and feeling insecure. Teens like to feel like they belong, that they look and act like their friends.
- ▶ Have a two-way conversation with your teen. Listen to them and respect their opinion. Provide your teen with information that is meaningful and balanced, without emotion or drama so that he/she feels empowered to make healthy choices about drugs.

Remember to keep the lines of communication open with your teen. Start early and get ahead of the drug questions. Teens should learn about drugs from their parents first. Be clear on where you stand about drugs. You are their most important role model and their best defence against drug use.

This brochure is a companion to the booklet *Talking with Your Teen about Drugs* and Web site for parents: [drugprevention.gc.ca](http://drugprevention.gc.ca)

For more information on talking with your teen about drugs, visit [drugprevention.gc.ca](http://drugprevention.gc.ca)

*How to Talk with Your Teen about Drugs – Communication Tips for Parents* is available on Internet at the following address: [drugprevention.gc.ca](http://drugprevention.gc.ca)

Additional related resources  
• *Help Prevent Drug Use by Your Teen – Tips on Developing Their Resiliency*  
• *Talking with Your Teen about Drugs*

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