

## What to Say to Your Teenager About Drugs (13-18 year olds) Resource: [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

This is a pivotal time for parents in helping kids make positive choices when faced with drugs and alcohol. Teens are a savvy bunch when it comes to this topic, and they need detailed and reality-driven messages from you. The following script will help you get the conversation going with your high school child:

**SCENARIO:** Your teen is starting high school — and you want to remind them that they don't have to give in to peer pressure to drink or use drugs. **WHAT TO SAY:** High school is going to be a ton of fun, and we want you to have a great time. But we also know there's going to be some pressure to start drinking, abusing medicine, smoking pot or taking other drugs. A lot of people feel like this is just what high school kids do. But it's actually not. Many high schoolers don't drink or use drugs, which means it won't make you weird to choose not to drink or use drugs, either. You can still have a lot of fun if you don't drink or use drugs. It is important to seek out these other kids who are making good choices, and be brave about trying new activities or making new friends. You'll have a lot of decisions to make about what you want to do in high school and you might even make some mistakes. Just know that you can talk to us about anything, anytime — even if you DO make a mistake or feel stuck in a situation that you need help to get out of. We won't freak out. We'll figure out a way to help you. We want you to count on us to help you make smart decisions and stay safe, okay?

### Tips for Conversations with Your Teenager

Make sure your teen knows your rules and the consequences for breaking those rules — and, most importantly, that you really will enforce those consequences if the rules are broken. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules. Kids who are not regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use drugs. Make it clear that you disapprove of all alcohol, tobacco and drug use. As teens are extremely concerned with their physical appearance, remind your teen about the negative effects alcohol, tobacco and other drugs have on physical appearance.

Let your teen in on all the things you find wonderful about them. They need to hear a lot of positive comments about their life and who they are as individuals — and not just when they make the basketball team or do well on a test. Positive reinforcement can go a long way in preventing drug use among teens. Show interest in and discuss your child's daily ups and downs. You'll earn your child's trust, learn how to talk to each other, and won't take your child by surprise when you voice a strong point of view about drugs.

Don't just leave your child's anti-drug education up to their school. Ask your teen what they've learned about drugs in school and then build on that with additional topics, such as how and why chemical dependence occurs; the unpredictable nature of dependency and how it varies from person to person; the impact of drug use on maintaining a healthy lifestyle; or positive approaches to stress reduction. If you are concerned about your teen, or simply would like support, please reach out to the drug prevention counselor at Red Hook High School.

Encourage your teen to volunteer somewhere that they can see the impact of drugs on your community. Teenagers tend to be idealistic and enjoy hearing about ways they can help make an impact. Help your teen research volunteer opportunities at local homeless shelters, hospitals or victim services centers.