

Make Prevention a Priority - Tips for Parents

We all know that telling your teen to “just say no” or not do something “because I said so” may not be effective. Prevention takes monitoring, on-going conversations, and healthy alternatives to substance use. Here’s what the experts recommend:

Get your teen talking – Listen without interrupting and without judging. Ask open-ended questions. Find out what your teen is thinking and why. Try starting with, “I hear a lot about vaping in the news. What do you think about it?” Maybe ask if they see it among kids their age. Ask why they think kids might be doing it.

Give them the facts – Many teens think vaping is no big deal. They may not realize a Puff Bar contains as much nicotine as 50 cigarettes. Share with them what you know about the addictive nature of nicotine in any form and that in addition to nicotine, there are other toxic chemicals in e-liquids.

Stay calm & provide support – If you’re worried your teen may be addicted, offer education and support. Contact www.KICKITCA.org or call 1-800-300-8086. It’s a free program through the CA Dept. of Public Health, offering science-based strategies to help teens and adults trying to kick the nicotine habit.

Addiction is a pediatric onset disease – 90% of adults with a substance use disorder began smoking, drinking, or using other drugs before age 18. The earlier and heavier the use, the more likely it is that a person will develop later problems (National Center on Addiction and Substance Use, Columbia University). The brain is rapidly developing and creating new neural pathways through age 25. Substance use at a young age floods the brain with artificially high levels of dopamine, priming it to crave more. Family history of addiction puts children at an increased risk for addiction themselves.

Be aware of your teen’s emotional state – Are they showing signs of depression or anxiety? Some teens begin using in an attempt to soothe uncomfortable feelings. Your child’s doctor may be a good source of information and support. Substance use compromises a teen’s ability to deal with the source of these issues, reduces their opportunity to develop healthy coping skills, and negatively impacts their academic, social, emotional, physical, and neurological development.

Set boundaries – Establish rules and consequences. Explain your reasons.

- Know the password to your child’s phone.
- Set a curfew – when they get home at night, be there to greet them. A goodnight hug is a great way to show your love *and* to check for the smell of alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, bloodshot eyes, etc. (Although vaping may not leave an odor behind.)
- When they’re going to a friend’s house, call or text the parents to make sure they will be home.
- Verify that the parents will not allow teens to drink alcohol, vape, or smoke.
- Tell your teens that you might/will drug test them. (Whether you actually do or not, it gives them a reason to say no, if peer pressure arises.) Nicotine, marijuana, and other drug tests are inexpensive and readily available online or at many pharmacies.
- Tell your teen what you expect. But if they make a mistake, make sure they know to call you, at any time of day or night, for a safe ride home.
- Establish a family “code”. If your child feels uncomfortable anywhere, they can call or text you with the code and you will know to pick them up immediately. For example, “I have a migraine”. This way, no one else has to know their true reason for leaving the party.
- Compliment your teen when they make good choices!