

There's one thing we know, **drugs won't make it better.**

Being a teenager can be a challenge, and nothing is more frustrating than when everyone older acts like it's a breeze. Smartphones and social media. Difficult exams. Drama. Chores. Sports. Lots of anxiety. Maybe it'll be better in the future, but right now, it's really tough.

If there's one thing we know, it's that **drugs won't make it better.** That's why we're here with advice and resources that can better support you in helping your teenagers get through the very real struggles they face on a daily basis.

Start having conversations with your child, now.

First things first, it's not easy to strike up a conversation about drugs and alcohol with a teenager. Creating an atmosphere that's casual and relaxed around this topic can be difficult.

We get it, but it's of utmost importance to reach out and create a dialogue with teenagers to start preparing them for situations involving alcohol and drugs. Stay as calm as possible and take the lead—anger and hostility will not get you anywhere in these conversations. Above all, **remember to tell your child you love them.**

- **Start talking about alcohol and other drugs from an early age** with age-appropriate language. This keeps the door open for your child to continue to ask questions as they enter high school and beyond.
- **Have ongoing conversations with your teen about alcohol and drugs**—from what drugs are and why people use them to informing them of the risks before they're exposed.
- **Know that your drinking behaviors can influence** how your teenager approaches alcohol and other drugs. If you choose to drink, be a smart role model for them by showing them what lower-risk drinking looks like.
- **Be aware of how social media** can expose them to additional alcohol advertising and drug-related content. Both advertising on social media and posts from friends and family are exposing teenagers at a younger age to alcohol and drug use, tempting them to make a risky choice in order to fit in and not miss out on what they might perceive as a fun time. It's important to encourage your teen to think critically about it.

What should you discuss?

Start with these topics.

These discussions can become the foundation that helps reduce the chance that your child experiences harm from opioids, alcohol, and other drugs later in life.

Help them understand the risks of substance use

Provide your child with accurate information about the dangers of substance use, including the impact it has on their health, relationships, and future. Encourage them to think critically about the myths and peer pressures surrounding substance use.

Equip them with refusal skills

Equip teenagers with strategies for saying “no” to offers of drugs or alcohol. Practice using firm, confident statements like, “No thanks, I don’t want to try that” or “I’m good without it.”

Another strategy is to **create a code word** to give your teenager a way out of challenging situations. If they text or call you with the code word, you’ll know to tell them to come home or that you’re going to pick them up. This gives them an excuse to leave an uncomfortable situation.

Support them through healthy relationships

Help your teen see the significance of surrounding themselves with supportive, positive friends who share healthy values while also showing them how to assertively communicate and set boundaries in their relationships.

Develop their support network

Give teenagers the tools needed to seek support when they need it—whether it’s from family members, friends, mentors, or counselors. It’s also important to promote open communication so they feel safe discussing any pressures or challenges they may face regarding alcohol and drugs.



Think they’re using drugs or alcohol?

Here’s how to identify masking.

Many signs of drug use in teenagers are behaviors that many young adults exhibit, and many are also symptoms of mental health issues, including depression or anxiety. However, if you have reason to suspect use, don’t be afraid to err on the side of caution. Prepare to take action and have a conversation during which you can ask direct questions.

- **Use your nose:** If your child has been drinking or smoking, the smell will be on their breath, on their clothing, and in their hair.
- **Look them in the eyes:** Pay attention to their eyes:
 - Eyes may be red and heavy-lidded, with constricted pupils, if they’ve used marijuana.
 - Pupils will be dilated, and they may have difficulty focusing, if they’ve been drinking.
 - A red, flushed color of the face and cheeks can also be a sign of drinking.
- **Watch their behavior:** After a night out with friends, are they particularly loud and obnoxious, or laughing hysterically at nothing? Unusually clumsy? Are they avoiding you? Are they frequently leaving their coat and backpack in the car? Are they coming home and finding a private space immediately, day after day? These are all signs that they could have been drinking or using marijuana or other substances.

Additionally, teenagers using opioids might have sudden and dramatic changes in mood and personality. They might appear to you as either more sullen and withdrawn or more hostile and angry.
- **Search their spaces:** If you have cause for concern, it’s important to find out what’s going on. Be prepared to explain your reasons for a search though—whether or not you tell them about it beforehand. You can let them know it’s out of concern for their health and safety. Don’t overlook your teen’s cell phone or other digital devices for contacts you don’t recognize.

Need more information and advice? We’ve got you covered.

This guide serves as a starting point for parents on how to have conversations with teenagers about alcohol and other drugs. For more information and a deeper dive into specific topics, visit [drugsmakeitworse.com](https://www.drugsmakeitworse.com) or reach out to your child’s school counselor.

