

# Talking to your child about Substance Use

## How do I start the conversation around substance use?

- Pose a hypothetical question: “What would you do if a friend offered you something to drink or smoke?”
- Ask your child what he or she knows about drugs; this will help you gain insight on their perception
- Use a story from the media or a personal experience as a reason to open the conversation
- End conversations with an open-door comment: “if you have questions, you can ask me at any time or if you are concerned about a friend(s) you can tell me and I can help”

## How do I prepare myself for this kind of conversation?

- Keep conversations open and frequent, having regular conversations about your child’s daily life in early stages is an important first step to a relationship that will allow for more serious conversations when needed
- Find resources with information that you can bring into the conversation to help empower good decisions
- Avoid “fear-based” conversations, i.e. “scaring” kids away from drugs has not shown to be effective. It is more useful to provide facts
- Once your child hears both the facts and your beliefs about substances, it will be easier for you to make rules and enforce them
- Parental disapproval is a big factor in preventing substance use. If they believe that you disapprove of it, they are going to be less likely to use
- Educate yourself so you can explain how alcohol/drugs affects youth differently than adults
- Be ready to listen. If kids feel heard they will be more likely to return to you for questions in the future

## When is the appropriate time to start the conversation around drugs?

- It is best and most effective that the conversation begins well before the pressures of adolescence
- Ages 9 to 11 are ideal for talking about substance use; it is more difficult to start discussions during the teen years. Although, it is never too late for parents to open the dialogue

## If I suspect they are already using, how do I start the conversation?

- Voice your concerns in a calm but open manner. Keep the focus on *their* use
- Use “I” statements, such as “I am worried about you. I’ve noticed you’re acting differently”
- If they admit to using or experimenting, ask them how much and how often they are using. Ask about their reason for using substances
- Explain the consequences of their behaviors: health risks, safety concerns, legal issues, as well as where this could lead them
- Offer and reach out for support: seek out a professional counselor or speak to your

