

National Red Ribbon Week is a week dedicated to raising awareness about drugs. Your voice matters in this week devoted to teaching our kids about the risks with getting involved with drugs. “Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids,” Partnership for Drug-Free Kids.

“When kids don't feel comfortable talking to parents, they'll seek answers elsewhere, even if their sources are unreliable. And kids who aren't properly informed are at greater risk of engaging in unsafe behaviors and experimenting with drugs,” according to KidsHealth.

★ Research has shown that kids who have conversations with their parents and learn a lot about the dangers of alcohol and drug use are 50% less likely to use alcohol and drugs than those who don't have such conversations (National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Inc.)

Here are some guidelines from Partnership for Drug-Free Kids on how to talk to your child at different ages: <https://drugfree.org/article/prevention-tips-for-every-age/>

★ Keep in mind that teachable moments come up all of the time — be mindful of natural places for the conversation to go in order to broach the topic of drugs and alcohol.

*** Each page below is for various age groups (5-8, 9-12, 13-18).*

Age 2-4

- Scenario: Give Daily Vitamin

- What To Say:
 - Helps your body grow, only take what mommy/daddy gives you - too many can hurt you and make you sick
- Scenario: Curious About Medicine Bottles Around House
 - What to Say:
 - Only take medicine with your name on it. If it's not yours, it could be dangerous and make you very sick.
- Scenario: Sees Someone Smoking
 - What to Say:
 - When someone starts smoking, his/her body feels like it now HAS to have more and makes it hard to quit. Talk about what it does to your body, lungs, etc.

Age 5-8

- Scenario: Child expresses curiosity about pills she sees you take everyday

- What to Say:
 - Just because it's in the family medicine cabinet doesn't mean it's safe for you take.
 - If you have a friend that says it's okay to take other medicines, let them know you know it's not safe.
- Scenario: Child dresses herself in a completely, unmatching, ridiculous looking outfit
 - What to Say:
 - "You look great! I love how you express yourself through your clothes." Celebrate their decision-making skills. Even if the outfit looks like a clown, you are reinforcing your child's ability to make decisions for herself.

Age 9-12

- Scenario: Your child is starting/in middle school and you know eventually, he will be offered drugs or alcohol
 - What to Say:
 - I know we talked about drinking and drugs when you were younger, but now is when they're probably going to be an issue. I'm guessing you'll at least hear about kids who are experimenting. I just want you to remember that I'm here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the stuff you hear or see. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?"

- Scenario: You find out that kids are selling prescription drugs at your child's school. Your child hasn't mentioned it and you want to get the conversation about it started.
 - What to Say:
 - Hey, you probably know that parents talk to each other and find things out about what's going on at school. I heard there are kids selling pills – prescriptions that either they are taking or someone in their family takes. Have you heard about kids doing this?" Let him know that in the future, he can always blame you to get out of a bad situation. Say, "If you're ever offered drugs at school, tell that person, "My mother would kill me if I took that and then she wouldn't let me play baseball."

- Scenario: Your child's favorite celebrity—the one he or she really looks up to—has been named in a drug scandal
 - What to Say:
 - Being in the public eye puts a ton of pressure on people, and many turn to drugs because they think drugs will relieve that stress. The thing is, when a person uses drugs and alcohol—especially a young person because he's still growing—it changes how his brain works and makes him do really stupid things. Most people who use drugs and alcohol need a lot of help to get better. I hope the celebrity has a good doctor and friends and family members to help him/her.

Age 13-18

- Scenario: Your teen is starting high school — and you want to remind him that he doesn'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?
- Scenario: Your teen has started to hang out with kids you don't know — and dropped his old friends.
 - What to Say:
 - It seems like you are hanging with a different crowd than you have in the past. Is something going on with your usual friends? Is there a problem with your old friends, or are you just branching out and meeting some new kids? Tell me about your new friends. What are they like? What do they like to do? What do you like about them?
- Scenario: Your high schooler comes home smelling of alcohol or cigarette smoke for the first time.
 - What to Say:

- The response should be measured, quiet and serious — not yelling, shouting or overly emotional. Your child should realize that this isn't just a small frustrating moment like when he doesn't do a chore you asked for; it's a very serious moment.
- Say, "I'm really upset that you're smoking/drinking. I need to get a handle on how often this has been happening and what your experiences have been so far. I get that you're worried about being in trouble, but the worst part of that moment is over — I know that you're experimenting. I love you and care about you. Your health and well-being are very important to me. Let's talk about this. I need you to be honest with me. So for starters, tell me about what happened tonight."

You may visit the page <https://drugfree.org/article/prevention-tips-for-every-age/> where I got all of this information from to get more *Tips for Conversation with Your.....*(age that your child is). Also on this page additional information such as: *How to Address Underage Drinking*, *How To Talk About Marijuana*, and much more!