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Vaping Conversation Guide

You can play a significant role in protecting your child from the dangers of vaping and nicotine dependence. Maintain an open line of communication with your child, and use the tips and suggestions below as a framework for having a productive conversation.

Even though parents know their children best, this guide was developed in parnership with child psychologists and includes best practices about how to have the most effective conversation with children on a tricky subject like vaping.

Before You Talk

Know the facts

Misinformation about vaping is everywhere. Two-thirds of teens don't even realize that e-cigarettes contain addictive nicotine.

Before the conversation, get comforable with the key dangers and potential motivations for children to vape. You may not feel like an expert, and that's okay. Expressing care and concern is one of the best ways to support your child.

Put yourself in your child's shoes

Consider your child's viewpoint. Imagine the obstacles, pressures and social environment before addressing your concerns.

Remember what it was like when you were a child. Make sure to relate to them. Remind them that you're on their side. When empathy is expressed and good communication exists, children take fewer risks.

Take an open and calm approach

As you talk to your child, avoid judgment or frustration. Children may pick up on your tone and tune out or react defensively.

An open conversation will disarm the notion that this is a lecture. It will also provide a relaxed environment to discuss ideas without making them feel like they are being blamed or in trouble.

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Find the right time and place

Wait for the right opportunity to increase the chance that you are heard. Maybe you're passing a vape shop, watching TV together or talking before your child goes to a concert with friends.

Pick a calm moment that is distraction free. Asking your child about vaping when it is already top of the mind gives you a non-confrontational way to learn about your child's awareness, interest and involvement without defensiveness.

Take time to practice

For important and potentially difficult conversations like these, it's helpful to know exactly what you'd like to say before you say it. Take time, in front of the mirror or with a partner, to run through the points that you feel are most important.

Consider how your child will react to the information. Try to anticipate how the conversation may go and come prepared to respond calmly to any situation. Use tips in this guide to help as you prepare.

While You're Talking

Acknowledge your child's independence

Your children make good decisions every day. Abstaining from vaping could be one of them. Thank them for their responsibility and appeal to their good judgment.

"I'm really proud that you make good decisions. I trust you. I'm here to help answer any questions you have about vaping."

Ask for their perspective

Hear their side of the story first. It's good to know what they find appealing or unappealing about it. If they're interested in trying it, ask why.

Ask them open-ended questions rather than yes or no questions. This will help them open up, be engaged and be less defensive.

"How do you feel about vaping?"

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Be ready to hear that your child may have vaped

A much higher percentage of children have tried vaping than most parents recognize. There is a distinct possibility that your child has experimented with vaping.

Make sure to start by thanking them for being honest. This is key for continuing an open conversation and relationship of trust. Explain that your motivation is protecting and caring for them.

"I want you to know how much I appreciate your honesty. I'm concerned because I care about you and your health."

Blame Big Tobacco, not your kid

Your child is the target of Big Tobacco advertising, devised to intentionally hook a young audience on nicotine, and make them customers for life. The same companies who funded and promoted cancer-causing cigarettes are the same ones behind many vape products like JUUL.

Remind your child that you are both on the same side when it comes to Big Tobacco.

"Do you know why JUUL pods and other e-cigarettes come in fruity flavors? They were intentionally created to hook kids."

Avoid scare tactics

It's good to share your concerns, but don't make the mistake of losing your child's attention with dramatic claims.

Equating vaping with other temptations or illegal drugs actually reduces your credibility and chances of connecting with them.

"I know that trying it once won't kill you, but vaping is harmful to your lungs and the rest of your body, plus it's addictive. Why take the risk?"

Connect with what they care about

Make their concerns personal. Explain how vaping can prevent them from achieving their future goals. Illustrate how vaping takes an invisible toll on mood, memory and attention span, impacting academic or career goals.

"You know that vaping can damage your lungs, making it harder to play sports you love like [example]. Are you sure you want to risk something you love?"

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After You Talk

Say thank you

Let your child know that you appreciate them for listening, for their honesty and for continuing to make the right decisions.

Ending the conversation on a note of trust will make it easier for them to talk to you when they have questions or need advice.

"I appreciate you for handling this so maturely. I know this stuff can be scary or confusing. I just want to help you make safe and informed decisions.

Help your child manage stress

Unforunately, stress is universal and can be experienced at a young age. Talk to your kid about any larger concerns or pressures they may be feeling. Make sure they have healthy outlets for relief.

"If you ever feel frustrated or overwhelmed, know that I'm always here to listen."

Help your child manage peer pressure

One of the largest motivating factors of youth vaping is influence from friends or classmates.

Consider rehearsing or role playing to give your kid the social tools to refuse tobacco products. Offer some quick facts or an anecdote that they may feel comforable sharing.

"I know it can be tempting if your friends are vaping and offer to share it with you. What might you do or say if your friends offer to vape with you? Remember, you can always blame me as a way to say no."

Follow Up

This isn't a one-time conversation. Even if everything goes well, over time there will be new curiosities, product developments and research findings.

Make sure to leave lines of communication open. Fact sharing is a great way to reintroduce the conversation topic.

"I know it's a lot to take in all at once. If you have any questions or want to talk more about this later, I'm always here for you."

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Share this information

There are other parents struggling with these same issues and how to address them. Encourage them to visit TalkAboutVaping.org to learn more.

Reference

Special thanks to Dr. Yasmin Cole-Lewis, Dr. Lisa Damour and Dr. S. Christy Sadreameli, who provided issue experise and feedback on this vaping conversation guide. Dr. Cole-Lewis is a postdoctoral fellow in pediatric pain psychology at Boston Children's Hospital. Dr. Damour is a psychologist, best-selling author, monthly *New York Times* columnist, and regular contributor to CBS News. Dr. Sadreameli is a pediatric pulmonologist at Johns Hopkins Hospital, where she takes care of pediatric patients of all ages with a variety of pulmonary conditions. She also serves as a volunteer medical spokesperson for the American Lung Association.