

Constructive Conversations: Helping your child live above the influence of drugs and alcohol

Talking to your student about drugs and alcohol can be intimidating for many parents, but it's important to start the conversation now! Studies show the earlier young adults are exposed to drugs and alcohol, the more likely they will become habitual, potentially abusive users as adults. The following are helpful tips on ways to strengthen the dialogue between yourself and your teen when confronting issues of drugs and alcohol.

- Refrain from casting judgments or using accusatory language during conversations with your child; it's important to frame these conversations within a context of mutual trust and respect. When you have reason to suspect your child has been involved with drugs or alcohol, rely upon the facts of the situation and present them in a calm manner.
- Be clear about your intentions. Creating a safe environment for speaking about drugs and alcohol is crucial to creating an open and honest conversation. State precisely what you do and don't intend to address in a conversation.
- Teens are more receptive when they feel they have a sense of control over a situation; be flexible about the terms of these conversations about drugs and alcohol and respect their preferences about time and location.
- Remember to praise your teen for the positive choices they make in their life as well. Developing a relationship in which your teen feels as though you notice and appreciate him or her for their good behavior will make them feel safer when problems arise.
- Agree upon rules and boundaries with your teen to ensure that both parties have a clear understanding of what behavior is expected; this will make it easier for you to hold your teen consistently accountable.
- Evaluate your conversations. Ask, "Who did most of the talking? Was there constructive dialogue, or was the conversation too emotionally charged?" The goal is to create a face-to-face dialogue in which both parent and teen participate in a productive manner yet also allows room for disagreement.

For more information on ways to communicate with your teen about drugs, alcohol, and other negative influences, visit www.theantidrug.com.