

Talking with Teens about Alcohol and other Drugs

HARM COMES FROM IGNORING OR NOT PREPARING FOR RISK – NOT FROM TALKING ABOUT IT

When we talk to our teens about the importance of wearing a seatbelt, it's not because we are expecting a car accident - we do it because we want them to be as safe as possible if an accident happens. Teens who understand how seatbelts can reduce the risk of injuries or death in an accident are not more likely to speed or drive dangerously, but they are more likely to take measures to be safe when in a vehicle. In the same way, it's important to talk to your teens about alcohol and other drugs and how to reduce the risks. Here are some tips to help you buckle up for the conversations.



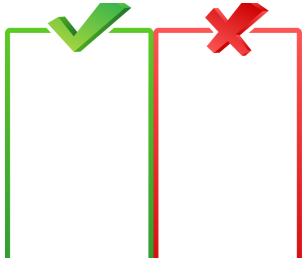
BRAINSTORM REFUSAL SKILLS

Saying 'No' is not as simple as it sounds - even for youth who don't want to use alcohol or drugs. Brainstorm with your teens other ways to refuse substances that might work for them ... "I don't like the way it makes me feel", "I have to work tomorrow", etc.



ENCOURAGE A HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

Being dehydrated or not eating enough can be harmful to health - it can also make the effects of alcohol and other drugs worse. Help your teen develop a variety of coping skills and interests so they don't feel the need to rely on alcohol or other drugs to cope or to have fun.



ACKNOWLEDGE THE RISKS AS WELL AS THE BENEFITS

Teens often know more about alcohol and other drugs than we realize. Be open-minded about learning what they know and their perspectives. Talk about the benefits that some people get when using alcohol and other drugs as well as the risks - this will help make you a more credible source of information and a safe person to talk openly with.



JUST SAY 'KNOW' INSTEAD OF JUST SAY 'NO'

Discuss how to identify reputable sources of information about drugs. Talk with teens about the different kinds of alcohol and other drugs, the risks of mixing, the time it takes to have an effect. Talk to them about overdoses and let them know the risks of using drugs that are unregulated (illegal) drugs and not knowing what is in them. If you don't know this information learn it together with your teen.

OFFER TO BE A SAFE NON-JUDGMENTAL RIDE HOME

Tell your teen you don't want them to drive or get in a vehicle with someone under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Encourage them to plan ahead - offer to be a safe ride home with no judgement or punishment.



TALK ABOUT REDUCING THE RISKS



Your teen or their friends may decide to use drugs. If they do, they should know how to be as safe as possible. Talk to them about the risks of mixing drugs or using drugs with alcohol. Discuss why they should not use alone and the importance of having a buddy system and looking out for their friends. Make sure they know where to access services like drug checking, safe supplies and naloxone. If you don't know this information learn it with your teen.



TALK ABOUT SEX AND SUBSTANCE USE

Make sure your teen understands how substance use can cloud judgement and increase vulnerability when it comes to sex and sexual assault. Help your teen get access to condoms, birth control and educate them about the importance of consent.



DON'T FORGET ABOUT ALCOHOL, CANNABIS AND PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Teens are most likely to use alcohol, cannabis and prescription drugs (without a prescription). While these drugs may be legal for adults and people with prescriptions that does not mean they are without risk. Teens should know what a standard drink is, the risks of drinking games and chugging, what alcohol poisoning is and what to do if a friend is passed out, the risks of using someone else's prescription, the differences between smoking cannabis and edibles.

HELP! I DON'T KNOW THIS STUFF! WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

We get it – this seems like a lot! Most of us were not taught about these things when we were teens. The good news is that you don't have to be an expert and you can learn more about drugs together with your teen.

The key is that you approach these conversations with an open mind, open ears and a lot of heart.

Our Youth Harm Reduction Toolkit has a lot more information including some of our favourite websites where you can learn more about drugs.

MORE INFO

