



TALKING TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH ABOUT SUBSTANCES

As children approach adolescence, they are finding out who they are, what they believe in, what they want to accomplish, and how they view themselves and others. As a parent, guardian, or adult ally you can have a huge impact through this discovery.

Key strategies to help prevent or delay children and youth from using substances like alcohol, vapes, tobacco and cannabis:

- Be a positive role model.** Be the kind of adult you want children to become. Reflect on your own opinions and values about substances.
 - Avoid normalizing substance use. Rethink statements like, "What a day, I need a drink."
 - Take care of yourself. Model healthy ways to cope with stress such as going for a walk, talking to someone you trust, and doing something you enjoy.
- Be engaged.** Look for opportunities to connect.
 - Take an interest in their activities and help them to pursue their passions.
 - Find activities that you can do together.
 - Be supportive and recognize their positive choices and accomplishments. For example: "Thank you for calling me for a ride home."
- Talk early and often.** From an early age, have conversations about anything and everything. Be open-minded and curious.
 - Consider talking when you're both calm and relaxed. Try situations where you can talk side by side such as in the car or while going for a walk.
 - Ask open ended questions like: "How do you feel about...?" "What worries you about...?"
- Help them plan ahead.** Together, brainstorm and practice what they could do in a peer pressure situation, like: delaying, deflecting, making a joke, walking away.
- Create realistic expectations.** Find the right balance between using authority and using negotiation.
 - Include children and youth in setting the rules and consequences; they are more likely to follow rules if they were involved in making them and understand why they exist.
 - Be clear about the expectations that are not up for discussion.
 - When rules are broken, follow through on the consequences.
- Stay connected.** Know where children and youth are, who they are with, and what they are doing.
 - Get to know the other important people in their lives.
 - Balance and adjust monitoring with their growing independence.
 - Educate them on responsible use of social media.
- Get the facts.** You don't have to be an expert. Explore reliable resources together.
 - Know the law such as age limits, driving restrictions, and permitted places of use.
 - Know the myths and facts related to substance use.

For more information on how to talk to children and youth about substances, check out:

- Drug Free Kids Canada: drugfreekidscanada.org
- Health Canada: [Talking with teenagers about drugs](#)

Where to go for help:

- 1Call1Click.ca (1-877-377-7775)
- [Child, Youth and Family Crisis Line](#) (1-877-377-7775)
- Triple P - Power of Positive Parenting program:
 - [MyTripleP](#)
 - [Valoris](#)
 - [Triple P Ontario](#)

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