

How to have a successful small talk.

Small talks about the impacts of substance use can make a big difference in a kid's choices. That's because kids really do listen. Research shows having frequent, casual conversations about substance use, starting around age 8, can be a lot more effective—and a lot less intimidating—than one super serious discussion. So, start talking. Keep listening. Help give a kid the confidence to say “No” to substance use.



What to do

Keep it casual

No fancy script or setting required. Just think about what you want to share with a kid before diving in, and take advantage of the one-on-one moments in your family routine.

Control your emotions

Be prepared to hear things you may not expect or like very much. Try taking a few deep breaths and keep listening. Wait to talk about your feelings when you're calm.

No answer? Don't panic

It's okay to admit when you need to learn more. Remember, you don't have to discuss everything all at once. It's better to have lots of short, casual talks as kids grow, anyway.

Set clear expectations

Make sure kids know that substance use is illegal and unacceptable. Set clear expectations for their behavior and enforce your house rules consistently.

Be a nonjudgmental resource

Become a kid's go-to for information and support—instead of friends or the internet—by taking all of their questions seriously and providing calm, nonjudgmental answers.

What to say

Ask open-ended questions

Get them talking by avoiding yes or no answers. Ask about their friends' choices, their school experiences, or their thoughts on the substance use they see in games, on TV, and social media.

Listen, listen, listen

Show kids you're interested in what they have to say. Ask questions and let their responses guide the discussion. Don't let the script in your head distract you from what's really being said.

Talk about the tough stuff

Kids can sometimes think of substance use as a way to cope with stress or trauma in their lives. Give them a safe place to talk about those feelings instead—with you or with a licensed medical or behavioral health care provider.

Don't keep score

It's tempting to correct kids when their info or opinions differ from your own. Avoid lecturing, using scare tactics, or trying to shut them down with facts. It'll keep the lines of communication open.

Consider sharing your own story

Afraid to discuss your own substance use experiences? What you share is up to you. But revealing your own choices, regrets, or family history may help kids understand what's at stake.



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