

## Having the Conversation... with Your Teen

**Make a plan.** Before you engage your teen in a conversation, you'll need to prepare yourself. Go for a walk, sit where you can't be disturbed, and think. Reflect on the facts of the situation. Try to avoid negative feelings of anger and betrayal—as they won't be useful to you in this conversation and may result in your child tuning out. Organize your thoughts. Decide what you want to say to your teen. Think about what resources you might need: a counselor, your faith leader, a school counselor, etc. Keep a dated journal of your feelings, discussions, and progress so that you can begin to identify a pattern of behavior.

**Present the facts.** Set the tone wisely. Open the discussion with a statement of your love and concern for your teen. You could begin with a statement of the facts as you know them: you found drug paraphernalia in their room; your teen has violated curfews; their grades have slipped; your teen has changed from being a “good kid” to someone who is getting into trouble at home, or school, or in the community; or simply, you have noticed your teen has become quiet, secretive and has changed from the kid you used to know.

**Listen.** After presenting the facts as you see them, ask your teen for his/her response to the information you've presented. Listen to your teen. Hear what he or she is saying. Try to determine if the problem is beyond your ability to help and therefore need to bring in a professional.

**Discuss.** The next step is to discuss the shared information. This may be the most difficult part, as the tendency for both you and your teen will be to respond angrily to each other. Don't accept flimsy excuses. Be steady and consistent in your approach. Don't get lulled into “looking the other way” because it's easier. Know that you are doing the right thing.

**Set Rules.** Firmly and warmly make it very clear that you will not tolerate drug or alcohol use by your teen. Identify the consequences if they do use. Some parents find it hard to set down clear rules. For these parents, it might help if they commiserate with their teen. For example, “I know it's difficult that I have to make these rules. But I wouldn't be a good parent to you if I didn't take care of your safety and make them.”

Some parents find it hard to remember to be affectionate while making clear rules. This parent may want to begin by recalling with the teen a time in the past when the teen followed a rule with good results. For example, “Remember the rule we have about doing your homework before any other activity? And look how well that worked out because you did so well in school.”

**Set Clear Consequences – Reward Good Behavior.** Let your teen know that you will be holding him/her accountable for his/her actions—and that there will be consequences for not following the rules such as loss of privileges or restricting their curfew. Also consider offering incentives or rewards. “Catch them” doing something right.

**Road Blocks.** Don't be surprised if your teen gets up and walks away in anger. Let everyone cool down and prepare to have the conversation again. Some ways your teen may try to deflect the conversation are by saying: “Why are you making this such a big deal. Everybody does it.” “That's not my stash; I was just holding it for a friend.” “I only used once; I don't hang out with those kids any more.” No matter what they say, calmly remind them, that nothing excuses your teen from using drugs or alcohol.

**Continue the Conversation.** Determine a time when you and your teen will have the next talk. Talking to your kids about drugs is a continuous process—not an event. Let your teen know that you will be having another “meeting” with him or her to check in. However, if you find that you're having the same conversation over and over and your message isn't being heard, you may want to seek assistance from a health professional or coach.

*Sponsored by The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign*

