

What You Need to Know About Tobacco to Talk to Your Teens



KNOW THE FACTS

Young bodies are more sensitive to nicotine, and youth become addicted more quickly than adults. Even social smoking once or twice a month puts teens at serious risk for nicotine addiction that will keep them smoking longer and increase their chances of getting a serious disease.

Most young smokers already show signs of damage to their hearts and blood vessels. One out of three teens who continue to smoke regularly will die prematurely—an average of 13 years earlier than their peers—because of smoking. Smokeless tobacco products also cause nicotine addiction.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You *CAN* influence your child's decision on whether to smoke. Even if you use tobacco yourself, your child will listen if you discuss your struggles with nicotine addiction and your regrets about starting in the first place. Be clear that you don't approve of smoking and that you expect your child to live tobacco-free.

- Tell your children that most kids *DON'T* smoke.
- Make your home and your car tobacco-free zones for everyone—family, friends, and visitors—and ban the use of all tobacco products.
- Set a good example and don't use tobacco yourself—it's the best thing you can do.
- Talk with your kids often about what nicotine addiction can cost them as they get older—and tell them you expect them to say no to tobacco.
- Make sure your children's schools enforce tobacco-free policies on campus and at all school-sponsored events.
- If your child is using tobacco, get help to quit for him or her right away. Nicotine is a highly addictive drug, and even experimenting with cigarettes one time increases your child's chance of being hooked for life. You can start by talking with your child's doctor.

WHERE CAN YOU GET HELP?

- www.cdc.gov/tips (stories of real people suffering the real effects of smoking)
- www.teen.smokefree.gov (help for teens who smoke)
- www2.aap.org/richmondcenter (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- www.BeTobaccoFree.gov
- www.surgeongeneral.gov
- www.cdc.gov/tobacco



Talk With Your Kids About Tobacco Use— Every Chance You Get!

Kids are less likely to smoke if they know you disapprove of it. They also respond if you share your own struggles with tobacco. If you've never smoked, tell them about family or friends who regret starting in the first place—or who have died from a smoking-related disease. The important thing is to talk with your children every chance you get and to get help right away if your child is using tobacco.

Try these conversation starters:

- Do you smoke or use tobacco? Do you think you ever would smoke?

There are lots of reasons most teenagers DON'T smoke.

- *It's expensive*
 - *It smells bad*
 - *It makes your clothes and breath stink*
 - *It gives you wrinkles*
 - *It's hard to quit once you start*
 - *It doesn't make you slim*
 - *Most teens think smoking is a dirty habit*
 - *Most high school seniors would rather date nonsmokers*
- What would you do if your best friend offered you a cigarette?

*You can reduce your child's risk by helping him or her be ready to say no. For some kids, the **direct approach** is best ["Gross! Those things stink!"]. For others, a more **low-key approach** works ["No thanks—I'm good."]. The important thing is to help your kids be prepared to resist peer pressure to use tobacco.*

- Tell me what you've heard about smoking and health. How long do you think you have to smoke for it to affect your health?

You can tell your kids they don't have to smoke a lot or smoke a long time to get a disease from it. Smoking can affect athletic performance, activity level, and endurance in a very short time. Worst of all, smoking is addictive. Like heroin and cocaine, nicotine changes the way your brain works. It makes you crave more nicotine.

Learn more on talking with your kids about smoking:

- www.lung.org/stop-smoking
- www.kidshealth.org/parent

