

Conversing with Teens about Substance Use

Within this society's culture sometimes we avoid talking about topics that make us uncomfortable but can be both lifesaving and changing, such as finances and drugs. Are there things that would have really made a difference in some of your experiences if known when younger, that can be shared with your teenager now? Here's a few tips for talking about substance use and misuse with your teenager.

Avoid:

- Overgeneralizations/horror stories
Ex: "People who use drugs go to jail and end up homeless." -That is not true for most people.
- Sharing about how you used to do drugs
Ex: "I smoked in high school, so I understand wanting to experiment." - The THC content in marijuana is much higher than when you may have used.
- Having loose boundaries
Ex: "It's okay if you do it at home, but not anywhere else." -This creates a gray area and demonstrates an acceptance for not following rules and established boundaries.

Tips:

- Have a united front or if alone be consistent.
Both parents need to communicate the same message. No good cop, bad cop.
- Recognize addiction in your family.
Speak the unspoken. Share information that could help your teen make an informed decision about "playing with fire" since they're genetically predisposed.
- Set a desired outcome for the conversation.
What do you want your teen to understand before you start the conversation?
- Focus on their health as important and a concern versus behavior.
Avoid finger pointing literally and figuratively.
- Set firm expectations & boundaries
Clearly explain what is and isn't acceptable for your household and the associated consequences.
- Keep a "cool head"
- Withhold judgment
- Be direct
- Be prepared for your teen's reaction.

Resources:

- Helpful Info to Quit Vaping: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/health/free-e-cigarette-quit-program>
- FCPS video on Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs: https://dl.ebmc.net/fcps/courses/ATODParentPresentationRequired103119b/story_html_5.html
- Knowing the signs of Substance Abuse: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VWGxTZrpCU>

For general questions about the FCPS Substance Abuse Prevention Program, please contact the Office of Student Safety & Wellness at: (571) 423-4270.

For further information & support:
Michael McNulty

Substance Abuse Prevention Specialist
mpmcnulty@fcps.edu