

# HOW TO TALK WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE

It's no easy matter for many parents to bring up the subject of substance use. Your child may try to dodge the discussion and you may feel unsure about how to proceed. As intimidating as it may be, the topic should not be avoided. Having these conversations decreases the chances of having to talk with your child about seeking professional help down the road. So talk with your child as soon as the time is right — and keep the conversation going.

**ESTABLISH A SAFE RIDE POLICY/EXIT PLAN.** Tell your child that they can always call or text you for a safe ride home. Agree on code words to use. Assure them there will be “no questions asked” in the moment (and then consider gently asking questions the next morning but don't demand answers). Review excuses that your child can make to exit a risky situation or not use substances (“I have to get up early in the morning” or “my parents will kill me” or “my parents drug test me”, and the like.)

**TALK EARLY.** Adolescents are being exposed to drugs at earlier and earlier ages. Experts say it is best for parents to talk to their kids around age 10-12 or even earlier. Ideally, you'll start the conversation long before your child really needs it. By the time they are ages 12-14, it is likely they already have been offered substances.

Of course, it's never too late to start. However, if your teen already has started using substances, the conversation will be different. Even if your child has experimented, there is still time to make sure he or she has all the facts. Knowing the risk may inspire a teen to cut back or quit.



**JUST SAY “KNOW”.** Before you talk to your child, get the facts about alcohol and various drugs from our Blog at [betheinfluence.us](http://betheinfluence.us). However, don't assume that simply dropping information on a teen will automatically lead them to make wise choices. Drill home key points. But don't let all the fact based research you know dominate the conversation.

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE.** Look for blocks of time to talk such as after dinner, before bed or in the car. Turn off any devices and really listen. Consider telling your teen in advance that you have something important to discuss and ask them when they would like to have the conversation. If teens set the time and place for the discussion, there's a good chance they will be more actively engaged.

Another option is take a walk or go for a drive together. With less eye contact, your teen won't feel like he or she is under a microscope.

## **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF “TEACHABLE MOMENTS”.**

Use every day or special events to naturally start conversations. They are less threatening to the child and can be more productive. For example, if you see a group of kids vaping, talk about the addictiveness of nicotine and its negative effects. Point out substance-related celebrity headlines or stories going on in your own community that show the negative consequences of substance use. When watching TV or a movie together or if you notice a billboard advertising alcohol, vaping or marijuana, ask how it makes alcohol or drug use look, how that makes your child feel about drugs and whether it's a problem at school.

Do not discuss the issue if they are under the influence. If your teen comes home drunk or high, it's tempting to confront the issue right then, but this won't be productive. Wait until your teen is sober, coherent and can be fully present for the discussion.

## **DON'T SHAME THEM WITH ANGER.**

Yelling matches won't help. Anger and accusations only make your teen defensive and shut down. Approach your teen with concern. Take a few deep breaths. Show compassion. Remain calm. Explain the concerns you have. Let your child know you are a source of support rather than guilt or shame.



**GET THEIR PERSPECTIVE.** Instead of leading with facts, start with genuine curiosity and ask open ended questions without sounding judgmental. Ask open ended questions (that don't result in a simple “yes” or “no” response) like “what do you think about weed”? or “are a lot of kids drinking” or “hey, I just read about this thing called a JUUL. What do you know about it?”

Finding out what your teen already knows and thinks about a substance will determine how the rest of the exchange might proceed. If your teen wrinkles her nose and says, “I tried it and didn't like it”, you're going to have a different conversation than if she responds “lots of kids are doing it and its not a big deal”.

Asking teens what they know about a topic increases the chances that they'll want to hear what we know about that topic too.

## **MAKE YOUR EXPECTATIONS CLEAR.**

Long before your kids face the pressures of adolescence, they should know your stance on substance use. Don't treat alcohol and marijuana lightly, even in conversations with other adults your children may overhear. If you convey the message that experimentation is okay, they are more likely to use substances. Parents'

disapproval is a huge factor in preventing substance use.

Clearly state your expectations and set firm rules - that you do not want your teen using drugs. You can say something like “my expectation is that you won’t drink, smoke or use other drugs. I have high standards because I know you’ll meet them and do what’s right.” Establish that there will be appropriate consequences for breaking your rules — and consistently enforce them.

**MAKE DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE A NON-NEGOTIABLE “NO-NO”.** In particular, explain that the prohibition includes being under the influence of marijuana, as a lot of teens think this is safer than driving under the influence of alcohol. Our teens report that it is not unusual for so called “designated drivers” or “DDs” to have used marijuana.

**TAKING A “HARM REDUCTION” APPROACH.** At some point, prevention efforts by necessity may turn to reality based “harm reduction” efforts — especially for older teens with more autonomy who are using substances.

**ACKNOWLEDGE THE LIMITS OF YOUR AUTHORITY.** After stating your expectations, concede that you don’t have the power to make your teen’s decisions for them and they must make those choices themselves. And that you hope they will be healthy decisions. Point out that whereas adolescence centers on the wish for independence, independence centers on the willingness to look after oneself.

**USE ACTIVE LISTENING.** Let your teen know she is understood by reflecting back what you hear — either verbatim or just the sentiment. Listen without interrupting, then sum up what you’ve heard, and allow her to confirm. Examples of phrases are “It seems like you’re feeling ...”, “I hear you say you’re feeling ...” or “Am I right that you’re feeling ....”



**USE “I” STATEMENTS.** These let you express yourself without your teenager feeling judged, blamed or attacked. Describe his behavior, how you feel about it and how it affects you. Then spell out what you need.

An example is “when you don’t come home on time, I worry that something terrible has happened. I need for you to call me as soon as you know you’re going to be late so that I know you are okay”. Or “because I love you and I want to keep you safe, I worry about you going to the concert. I need to know that you will obey our rules about not drinking or using drugs”.

**DON’T JUST USE SCARE TACTICS.** While it’s important for parents to tell children that substance use can have negative consequences, focus on the positives too. Tap into their vested interests, by explaining that avoiding substances can make easier something they value or are working toward: a scholarship, their first-string playing time on the court or field, a high GPA, a high SAT or ACT score, passing driver’s ed, getting into a desired college, getting a job, etc.

**USE CARROTS IN ADDITION TO STICKS.** Teens want our trust and their freedom. Explain that you are much more likely to give them that if you have confidence they will abstain from using substances. Offer praise when they are doing so. “Catch them being good”.

**GIVE TEENS MORE ADVICE THAN “JUST SAY NO”.** As a backup to just saying “no”, help your teen think of other ways to refuse offered substances. Examples are “I have to get up early”, “My parents wait up for me to see if I’m sober”, “I don’t like the taste of alcohol”, “My mom is crazy. She drug tests me”.

**DISCUSS YOUR CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT.** Teens like hearing about their parents’ personal experiences. While it is not wise to overshare or tell war stories, it is helpful to get their attention by sharing the environment you navigated as a teen and compare and contrast it to theirs.

**WHATEVER YOU DO, DON’T LIE.** When asked “did you drink or smoke when you were young?”, an approach is to admit that you did use substances as a teenager, but that it was a mistake. Give your teen an example of an embarrassing or regretful moment that occurred because of your substance use.

Differentiate between what we know now about the effects of substances on the developing adolescent brain. Point out how powerful today’s marijuana is versus its low potency back in your day. Or distinguish between chugging a bottle of beer as you may have done in high school and a taking gulps from a bottle of vodka, as teens do today.

**OFFER EMPATHY AND SUPPORT.** Let your child know you understand that the teen years can be challenging. Acknowledge that everyone struggles sometimes, but alcohol and drugs are not a useful or healthy way to cope with problems.

Remind your child that you are there for support and guidance. Make sure your child knows that if they make the wrong choice, you’re still there for them.

**SHARE YOUR FAMILY HISTORY.** If there is a history of chemical dependency in your family, educate your teen about genetic vulnerabilities towards substance abuse. If you have personal experiences with addiction and recovery, share them. Don’t hide valuable knowledge you’ve gained from experience in an effort to maintain a perfect image. Your teen can learn from your mistakes, but you have to be willing to share them.

**MAKE IT AN ONGOING CONVERSATION.** Remember you don’t need to cover everything at once. In fact, you’re likely to have a greater impact on your child’s decisions by having a number of talks about substance use throughout their adolescence. Think of your talks as part of an ongoing conversation. If they are not complaining that you are talking about the topic too much, then you are probably not talking about it enough!

# TIPS ON SETTING BOUNDARIES AND MONITORING YOUR CHILD

While you do not want to be a hovering parent, now is the time to “lean in”. Bear in mind, however, that “one size does not fit all” and every family has their own values and dynamics. Depending on your relationship with your teen and their openness with you, and your teen’s age, temperament, maturity and track record - as well as those of their friends — and your own parenting style and priorities. Even if you think experimentation is an inevitable “rite of passage”, don’t make it easy for your teens to do so. It’s a parent’s job to put barriers and “speed bumps” in place.

**BE WARY OF LARGE PARTIES, PARTIES WITH OLDER TEENS AND SLEEPOVERS.** Parents of younger teens (especially rising freshman and sophomores) should say “not yet” or otherwise discourage their teens from attending large parties or those with teens from more senior grades. The world of a 14-15 year old is very different from that of a 17-18 year old. Also beware of your high schooler attending parties with college-aged kids.

Parents are often absent, the parties are loosely supervised or parents look the other way or at times even provide alcohol. Also, be wary about last minute sleepover requests. Use the BTI Parent List to reach to the hosting parents and confirm your child is invited, and they will be present. If the parents are not listed as BTI Parents, be particularly sure to reach out and additionally ask whether the party will be supervised and substance free and what efforts will be made to keep it so



**KNOW WHERE YOUR TEEN IS GOING AND WITH WHOM, ESPECIALLY IF DRIVING.** Consider using “Find My Friends,” Life 360 (which shows a history of where your teen has been, not just where your teen is at the moment) or other app on your phones to verify your teen’s whereabouts. This also applies to where your teen is during the day. In particular know who your teen is driving with. If you aren’t home, be aware that your child can track you too! By knowing your whereabouts, clever kids can throw a party and kick everyone out and clean up before you make it home! Get to know your teens’ friends and their parents by using the BTI Parent List.

**DO NOT ALLOW YOUR NEW TEEN DRIVER WITH A “PROVISIONAL” RESTRICTED DRIVERS LICENSE TO DRIVE OTHER TEENS OR ALLOW YOUR TEEN TO BE DRIVEN BY A NEW TEEN DRIVER.** Under the law, new drivers should not be driving friends until they have had their license for a specified

period of time. (In California its one year and in Colorado its six months). Having new drivers with friends in the car greatly increases the risk of an accident and can result in substantial liability. Say “no” to your teen getting a ride with a new driver, even if it makes life more convenient.

**TRUST YOUR TEEN...TO BE A TEEN!** Teen brains are wired for risk taking. A common refrain of teens to parents is “You don’t trust me!” The response? “It’s the situation that is giving us pause and I don’t think any teen would do well in an unsupervised party environment”, “we’re not sure if we trust all the others you will be with”, trust is earned, not given or “we trust you to be a teenager!”

**SET A REASONABLE CURFEW AND CHECK-INS.** There is no reason for teens to be out at all hours of the night. Most local curfew laws are at 11pm or midnight. For rising freshman and sophomores, think about what time is okay for a senior to come home at night. Then count backwards. Realize that every year, you will want to move your teen’s curfew a little later to reward good behavior and acknowledge growing maturity and freedom. Of course, sometimes flexibility is called for with a later curfew than normal. But if you start 9th grade with a blanket midnight curfew, you will soon find yourself in trouble.

Regarding check-ins, having some face-to-face contact is best and a FaceTime or phone conversation is even better than texting. Trust ... but verify such as through a landline, Find My Friends, Life 360 or similar app.

**ESTABLISH CONSEQUENCES IF YOUR TEEN VIOLATES YOUR AGREEMENTS.** Local law enforcement officers often comment that when called, parents seem more concerned with the legal ramifications than on disciplining their teens. Set consequences which have a connection to the behavior or rule violation.

**GIVE A GOODBYE REMINDER, HELLO HUG OR GOOD NIGHT KISS.** Be around if possible when they leave for a night out, perhaps with a reminder of your rules and consequences. This will also ensure there is no “pre-gaming” at your home. After a teen’s night out, parents should stay up to greet their child, look them in the eye and give them a hello hug or good night kiss (and a discreet sniff) when they come home. Have a conversation with them and try not to be asleep or out on the town yourself when they arrive.

**DON'T PLACE ABSOLUTE TRUST IN DESIGNATED DRIVERS.**

Healthy Kids Surveys show that too many so-called designated drivers are simply less drunk or high than their passengers. Moreover, many kids have the mistaken belief that driving stoned is slower and safer than driving drunk. Both are dangerous.

**BE WARY OF PARTY BUSES.**

Party buses are popular for special events such as Prom and can be a lot of fun. Yet, without precautions, party buses often involve risky levels of binge drinking and other drug use. Parents can take several measures to help ensure there are no substances on the bus. In particular, the parent who is signing the party bus contract has the authority to set the rules and require that all passengers and their parents agree to these rules ahead of time. Examples of precautions are searching any backpacks and large purses and keeping them in the storage compartments on the outside of the bus. Do not allow passengers to bring water bottles as these can be filled with alcohol; instead parents should provide the water.

Finally, be sure to rent from a reputable bus company that is licensed with the the California Public Utilities Commission, has adequate liability insurance and qualified bus drivers. Some bus companies require chaperones as a matter of company policy or you may consider providing your own. Party buses enable extreme levels of partying.



**BE AWARE OF LOCAL SOCIAL HOST ORDINANCES AND OTHER LAWS.**

Social Host Ordinances throughout many communities hold parents strictly and financially accountable for underage substance use in their homes. Some local police departments publish press releases about social host violations with your street and block named and if your teen is 18 years old or over, your family may be identified by name.

**IF YOU ARE LEAVING YOUR HOUSE UNATTENDED, TAKE PRECAUTIONS AND USE LAW ENFORCEMENT AS SUPPORT.**

If you are going out for the day or evening or going out of town, ensure your house won't become "The Party Spot." Make sure you are not the one who is being tracked through "Find My Friends" or another tracking app! Never hesitate to contact police for help if a party gets out of control. Local



police also can be contacted for drive-by "vacation checks."

**"TEENPROOF" YOUR HOME.**

Reduce easy access to alcohol, marijuana and prescription drugs by "teen proofing" your home and locking up or otherwise securing or keeping track of any alcohol and other drugs. Consider purchasing a prescription "lock box" or "lock-top bottles", available inexpensively online. Don't make it easy for your teen to experiment with or use alcohol or other drugs — even if you think it is an inevitable "rite of passage."

**HIDDEN STASHES AND FAKE ID'S.**

Periodically check for hidden alcohol, marijuana and other drugs or paraphernalia. Teens can be creative with hiding places so be on the lookout for things like hollowed out books as well as "fake ID's", all of which can be found in bedrooms, cars and wallets. Fake ID's are easy to obtain online and usually come in pairs. If you find one and destroy it, chances are a second one is around.

**POSTPONE OR KEEP TRACK OF UBER, LYFT OR TAXI RIDES.**

While certainly safer than driving drunk or drugged, these forms of transportation enable excessive levels of drinking and other drug use. Consider not allowing them for younger teens without driver's licenses if you are able to be driving them. For older teens who are driving, keep track of how frequently your teen is using these services. Frequent use may well indicate substance abuse.



## How to Host a House Party

**PLAN AHEAD.** The overarching advice when hosting a party is to plan ahead. Planning together offers an opportunity to discuss the responsibilities assumed when hosting a party and your rules.

Planning a party together with your child offers an opportunity to have an open healthy conversation and discuss your rules, values and expectations as well as the responsibilities and liabilities assumed when hosting a part.

**SET GROUND RULES.** Discuss the ground rules that need to be followed for the party to happen. It goes without saying that no alcohol, marijuana, smoking, vaping or other drugs will be allowed. Make sure your child is aware of the legal repercussions you face as an adult and host. To learn about the legal Consequences in your area, visit our website at [betheinfluence.us](http://betheinfluence.us).

Have your child inform each invitee of these rules in advance. If a guest brings alcohol or other drugs, ask that guest to leave. If someone shows up under the influence, consider calling the parents or, at the least, provide a safe ride directly home from a sober adult or teen or by ordering an Uber, Lyft or taxi ride. Don't just kick them out.

Other ground rules include setting a definite start and end time, which areas of the home will be open and which will be off limits, how many guests will be invited, etc. Consider sending an email to parents informing them of your ground rules and giving out your contact info.

### **AGREE ON A GUEST LIST AND LIMIT ATTENDANCE.**

Do not send invitations via email, social media or any other method that can be duplicated or widely forwarded. Greet guests as they arrive and consider checking names off as they enter. Don't admit party crashers. If it's a large party, consider the use of customized wristbands for attendees that are handed out to each guest as part of the invitation.

**LEAVE BACKPACKS AND COATS AT THE DOOR.** The same goes for birthday presents if it's a birthday party as teens have been known to sneak in alcohol or drugs in beautifully wrapped boxes! Don't underestimate teens' creativity — the internet offers a dizzying array of products designed to hide substances, e.g., plastic pouches that secure to underwear.

**DON'T ALLOW OUTSIDE FOOD OR BEVERAGES.** For example, even water bottles can be filled with vodka instead of water. Soft drinks can be mixed with alcohol. Marijuana edibles are common.

**NO IN AND OUT PRIVILEGES.** Partygoers who choose to leave will not be allowed to re-enter. Consider hiring security.

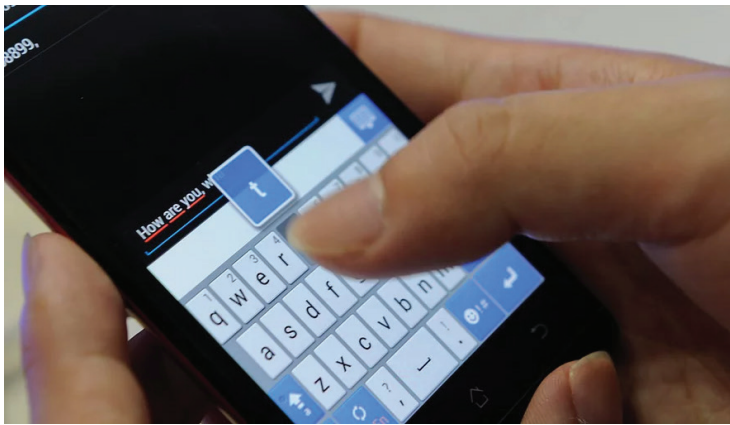


**PLAN ACTIVITIES AND THEMES.** Music is a given. Consider a theme party centered around participation such as games (glow in the dark tag is fun if you have a big back yard), karaoke, pizza making, creating videos, silent disco, etc. Get creative!

**SECURE ANY ALCOHOL, MARIJUANA, OR PRESCRIPTION DRUGS.** Keep it all out of sight, preferably under lock and key. Safely discard unused prescriptions drugs before the party.

**NOTIFY YOUR NEIGHBORS AND ALERT YOUR LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENT.** Many police departments will be happy to increase patrols. Ask your neighbors to keep an eye out for any behavior they think questionable and to call you with any issues.

**CIRCULATE DURING THE PARTY.** Be visible, available and aware of what's going on — but stay sober and don't join the party! Do so even if you are hiring security. If you are not hiring security then invite another parent or couple over to help with chaperoning (consider modeling abstinence yourself for the evening and the fact that you don't need alcohol to socialize). Serve plenty of snacks and non-alcoholic drinks. Circulate regularly through the party, frequently checking out of bounds areas, including your yard, outside in cars and the streets.



**NEVER ALLOW ANYONE YOU SUSPECT TO BE INTOXICATED OR HIGH TO DRIVE.** Call their parents/caregivers or ask a sober adult to drive them home.

**DON'T ALLOW AN INTOXICATED GUEST TO "SLEEP IT OFF".** Alcohol poisoning and overdose can be fatal, and laypeople cannot assess the medical condition of a teen under the influence. Call 911 for an unconscious teen. Good samaritan laws are in existence in most areas.



## Attendance at Parties

**USE THE BE THE INFLUENCE PARENT LIST.** Determine whether the hosting parents are BTI participants. If so, reach out. If not, still reach out using other means (your school directory or ask your child).

First, **FIND OUT IF THEY KNOW ABOUT THE PARTY.** Get assurances that they will be present and actively chaperoning the party. Although it can be uncomfortable to ask additional questions, doing so will give you peace of mind. In particular, ask:

- **What is the start and end time, theme, activities and other party particulars?**
- **Is this an invite only or open party and how many guests are invited?**
- **Will alcohol, vaping, marijuana use and other drugs be prohibited?**
- **Who will be chaperoning the party?**
- **Will there be in and out privileges?**
- **What are plans if things go awry?**

**DROP YOUR CHILD OFF IF POSSIBLE.** If you drop your child off, introduce yourself to the host's parents. Provide your phone number to the host's parents and encourage them to call if there are any issues. If something feels wrong, trust your instincts and don't let your child stay. (You can leave first and have your teen follow a few minutes later to save face). Be wary of allowing sleepovers. If you allow one, consider a FaceTime or other checkin.

**DISCUSS SAFETY PRECAUTIONS.** Instruct your teen never to leave a drink unattended. Consider providing GHB test strips from [drinksafe.com](http://drinksafe.com) or "Smart Straws" (soon to be released). Suggest they inspect food for the symbol indicating THC.