

Conversation Starters – conversations with teens about drugs and alcohol run the gambit – from easy to difficult. Excellent conversation methodologies exist today, i.e. Courageous Conversations, the ideas of asking more questions, using effective listening skills, using “I statements,” etc... are all worth exploring. How some parents have started talking:

- Do you see ads on social media for pot/weed? What do they say? What apps are they more likely to be on? What do you think about them? Who do you think they are targeting?
- Are you following anyone on Twitter or Insta that has a pot/weed-identity? Or smokes a lot of pot? Or talks a lot of pro-pot/weed stuff? What do you think about them? Why do you think they do it?
- I’ve learned some recent stuff about pot/weed, did you know.....
- Do you know kids who smoke pot/weed? Is it easy to stay away from it? Do you have to do anything special? How would you say “no” if a friend said, “hey try this vape pen” or brought marijuana to our house at a sleep over or if you were at a friend’s house and there was pot/weed?
- What do think about kids hosting parties? What do they get out of it? Does it elevate his/her standing with their peers? With older kids? Are they “yesterday’s news” after the party? Would you want to be known as, “the kid who has parties when their parents aren’t home?”
- Parent response:
 - Validate and compliment teen behaviors or thinking if you agree with it
 - Explain your concerns if hearing things you don’t want to hear from your kid
 - If you are worried after a conversation like this that your child is using or is very interested, dive in deeper for what’s motivating this. Then (work with a partner) get clear on what’s acceptable for your family and start figuring out what and when you will circle back to clarify your expectations
 - Ways to express reasons for wanting your child to not use/wait:
 - The facts about brain chemistry, brain injury and addiction
 - Physical injury – at a consuming environment, certainly in a car, sexual assault, etc
 - What I love about you.... “I don’t want a drug or early substance use to change that; this is what’s at stake
 - It’s illegal

If you find your teen is using, attempt to:

1. Be patient, ready to listen, avoid criticism, encourage open dialogue
2. Find out why
3. Assess severity of use (i.e., experimentation, social, substance abuse)
4. Assess individual, family and environmental stressors
5. Reassess family pace/identify things that can change
6. Re/establish boundaries, rules & consequences
7. Help identify ways the child can make different decisions
8. Seek out courses of action and solutions that feel authentic for your family, even if they vary from others
9. Depending on the need, professionals can help parents understand what’s happening to them and figure out how to act. Look for psychologists with an addiction & adolescent specialty. In-patient rehab may be warranted right away, but it is typically an option that comes later in the addiction cycle. Much can, and probably should, be explored prior to rehab.

Sleep overs

- “No, never, no need. Every teen is sleep deprived anyway. Go have fun and come home to sleep in your own bed”
- “Yes, my girls love them. They tend to be the night’s event and I know all of the girls that are over”
- “If I do let them sleepover at someone else’s house, I always call or text parents to see if they are home”
- “Try to never allow sleep overs, but if I must for some reason, I ask my kid to take a picture of themselves with their friend’s parent and text it to me. If they can’t or don’t, they must come home”
- “If yes, they have to come home and I drive them to the sleep-over house. I want the car out of the equation.”

Curfew (in general and after parties)/moving around town

- 9th grade – 9pm, 10th grade – 10pm, 11th grade – 11pm; 12th grade – 12am and on a case by case basis; change curfew as birthday gift.
- “Every time you change location, you have to text me
- “You have to give me a proof-of-life “POL” once per hour – text “POL.”
- **Involve teens in the realities of the family** – This can elevate the authenticity of the conversation – it’s not just “because I said so” but “because you are part of this family and this is how it has to work”
 - “I (parent) cannot sleep when you’re out of the house. I have to catch up on my sleep over the weekend/I have to be rested when I go to work. You have to be in the house by X.”
 - “I (parent) have to be in bed by 9:00. You have to wake me up at 11:00 when you get home. I have to know your home, see you and hug you.” It’s hard to wake up, but it helps my daughter make decision while she’s out.
 - “You (teen) can’t go out while I’m gone. No friends over while I’m out. If I see you out while I’m gone (find-my-phone), ‘there will be severe consequences.’” If the teen is upset by this, schedule a day when they can be out or have friends over. “I’m out Friday, you go out with your friends Saturday.”

Miscellaneous Dialogue & Tips

- “I don’t know if I’ve said, ‘I expect you to not put anything in your body that’s illegal. My goal for you is that you stay healthy, and that you drive completely sober and that you take care of friends that might make different choices from you.’”
- “Every time my son goes out the door ‘no alcohol,’ ‘no drugs,’ ‘no unprotected sex.’ “Ok mom.”
- “We talk a lot about the unpredictability of drugs – don’t know what you’re getting, but even more importantly you don’t know how your body is going to react.”
- “We trust you until we can’t trust you”
- “Stay away from alcohol, marijuana and other drugs, but if you have anything, call us and we will come get you (we expect you to behave in this particular manner, but if you make a mistake we still want you safe)
- Let neighbors know your plans especially if gone over night – “no cars should be in the driveway”
- “Watch how much you (parent) glorify alcohol (and pot) in conversation”
- “If my kid is going to hang out with kids I’ve never heard of before or haven’t heard of since elementary school – it’s a red flag – that’s the house where the parents aren’t home and they are drinking- I’m calling”