

# Helping Your Kids to be Informed About Drugs and Alcohol

One of parents' most pressing concerns is how to help their children make healthy life choices, especially with respect to drugs and alcohol. Guidelines that might help are listed in the article below.

## How it begins

It is during early adolescence that children are likely to encounter drugs and alcohol for the first time. As children become more independent and start to experience new situations, they will naturally meet more people and encounter these risky situations.

Most young people experiment with drugs or alcohol simply because they are curious or because their friends do it and fitting in is important to young people. There are several reasons why young people may continue to use drugs and alcohol past the experiential stage. Alcohol and drugs produce a “high” that makes them feel good. Other reasons include:

- to quell loneliness and/or boredom
- to defy authority
- to test limits as they move through various developmental stages
- to gain self-confidence
- to appear more mature
- biological predisposition to drug dependence
- mental health problems
- family struggles

## Helping your kids make healthy choices

Though many children may try drugs or alcohol, it is important to keep in mind that experimentation is very different from addiction. Not all children and teens will try drugs they are exposed to. The following steps can help you keep your children out of the clutches of drug or alcohol addiction:

**Educate yourself and your kids.** Knowledge is one of the best interventions for preventing substance misuse, so it may be helpful to familiarize yourself with the latest substances that are on the scene. Access is now easier than ever, with drugs being available to order online. You can visit [FRANK](#) or [Drug Free Kids Canada](#) for a list of substances your child may encounter. You could even explore the site with your child and have an open, age-appropriate discussion.

**Understand your kids.** Remember your own childhood and adolescence. Were there ways in which you tried out different avenues wanting to be your own person and/or look for acceptance from others? Your children will most likely learn the same way you learned—that is, by making mistakes. It may frighten you as a parent, but it is an essential part of growing up.

**Communicate.** This is perhaps the most important element in preventing several types of problems, including addictions. In general terms, show your concern and interest, and express

your fears and other emotions as clearly as possible without blaming your child for them. If your child has not yet talked to you about drugs or alcohol, ask them about it. Avoid giving orders or long lectures, and allow your kids time to clarify and express their feelings. Do your best to understand their point of view. Listen, listen, and listen some more.

**Give guidance and supervision.** Simply put, children need clear rules about what is and is not acceptable behaviour. By setting rules and having reasonable expectations of your child's behaviour, you show that you believe your kids are worthy and capable of achieving these standards. This is the foundation of developing the positive self-esteem that kids will use to resist peer pressure and develop their own set of values and principles.

**Get support for yourself.** If you are struggling with a child or teen and feel like you need extra support, contact your assistance programme. There are also support groups that can help such as [Al-Anon Family Groups](#) and [Nar-Anon](#), if you are worried about your child's behaviour.

**Be attentive.** If you believe your child is using drugs or alcohol, start by observing them. Pay close attention to what is going on in your child's life, who they socialize with, and any significant changes in their behaviour.

**Set an example.** As a parent, you may want to look at your own behaviour and the example you are setting with respect to drugs and alcohol. After all, kids learn a lot more by watching adults than by listening to them!

While you cannot guarantee that your kids will not use or become addicted to drugs, you can work on maintaining a good relationship with them. You will achieve this by spending time with them, making them feel that they can talk to you about anything, and above all, reinforcing at every step that you will be there for them with your love and an open mind, helping them make the best possible choices for themselves.

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