

Talking to Children and Youth about

Substances

As children approach adolescence they are finding out who they are, what they believe in, what they want to accomplish, and how they view themselves and others. As a parent, guardian, or adult ally you can have a huge impact through this discovery.



Key strategies to help prevent or delay children and youth from using substances, like alcohol, e-cigarettes, tobacco and cannabis:

- 1 Be a positive role model.** Be the kind of adult you want children to become. Reflect on your own opinions and values about substances.
 - Think about what you do and say. Rethink statements like, "What a day, I need a drink".
 - Take care of yourself. You can model healthy ways to cope with stress such as going for a walk, talking about problems, and focusing on the positive things that happened during the day.
- 2 Be engaged.** Look for opportunities to connect with children and youth.
 - Take an interest in their activities and help them to pursue their passions.
 - Find activities that you can do together.
 - Be supportive and praise them for their positive choices and accomplishments. For example: "Thank you for calling me for a ride home."
- 3 Talk early and often.** From an early age, have conversations about anything and everything. Be open-minded and curious.
 - Consider talking when you're both calm and relaxed. Try situations where you can talk side by side such as in the car, while going for a walk, or when sitting beside each other.
 - Ask open ended questions like: "How do you feel about...?" "What worries you about...?"
- 4 Create realistic expectations.** Find the right balance between using authority and using discussion and negotiation.
 - Include children and youth in setting the rules and consequences; they are more likely to follow rules if they were involved in making them.
 - When rules are broken, follow through on the consequences.
 - Be clear about the expectations that are not up for discussion.
- 5 Stay connected.** Know where children and youth are, who they are with, and what they are doing.
 - Get to know the other important people in their lives.
 - Balance and adjust monitoring with their growing independence.
 - Educate them on responsible use of social media.
- 6 Know the facts.** Be prepared when you talk.
 - Know the law such as age limits, driving restrictions, and permitted places of use.
 - Know the myths and facts related to substance use. Look for reliable resources together such as on your local public health units' websites: www.healthunit.org; www.eohu.ca.

For more information on how to talk to children and youth about substances, check out:

- [You, Your Teen, and Substance Use](http://www.healthunit.org), accessible at www.healthunit.org
- [Cannabis: What Parents/Guardians and Caregivers Need to Know](http://www.camh.ca), accessible at www.camh.ca
- [Drug Free Kids Canada](http://www.drugfreekidscanada.org), accessible at www.drugfreekidscanada.org
- [Talking Pot with Youth](http://www.ccsa.ca), accessible at www.ccsa.ca

Where to go for help:

- 211's telephone helpline (dial 2-1-1) and website: <https://211ontario.ca/>
- Checkered Flags Help List: http://www.checkeredflags.ca/For_Help.shtml
- Triple P: www.triplep-parenting.ca