

# Talking to your child about drugs



You want your child to have a bright future. To help with that, here are five strategies for talking about alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs.

- 1 Start talking (and listening) to your child...about everything**  
Do you and your child talk regularly? Conversations about alcohol and other drugs are just one part of a larger relationship with your child, and this relationship really matters. Whether it's in the car, at a meal, or before bed, create times every week – even every day – to ensure simple, honest conversations are a normal part of life together as a family.
- 2 Be an 'ask-able' parent**  
Does your child feel comfortable coming to you with questions? There are some conversations about drugs you need to initiate, but children will have their own set of questions as well. Aim to be the first place they turn to for answers. Being a good listener can be one of the most important things when it comes to talking about drugs with your child.
- 3 Communicate your expectations – early and often**  
This isn't a conversation you need to keep putting off. Conversations about family rules for alcohol and other drugs that occur earlier in a child's life (before youth start to initiate) tend to have more of an impact than those that occur when the child is older. And what you say matters – children who know their parent disapproves of substance use are less likely to use them.
- 4 Put laws in the context of love**  
You need to have rules (see point #3). But it's important for your child to remember you have rules because of how much you love your child, not a lack of it. You want the best for your child, and that's why you have rules around drinking, smoking, and other drugs. Communicate your love to them often and have your rules as a part of this broader, supportive relationship.
- 5 Build resistance efficacy in your child**  
“Resistance efficacy” means being able to refuse drugs when offered. It's a really important skill for you child to have and, not surprisingly, a focus of nearly all drug use prevention programs. And although it may sound simple, it often isn't. If a friend or peer asks them to try something...does your child have a prepared and practiced response?

## Author

[Dr. Allen Barton](#), Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist,  
Department of Human Development & Family Studies, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

[united.illinois.edu](https://united.illinois.edu)

## Additional Resources

[Talk. They Hear You. \(mobile app for parents\)](#) | [bit.ly/3FeqPc1](https://bit.ly/3FeqPc1)  
[Partnership to End Addiction](#) | [drugfree.org](https://drugfree.org)  
[Family Resource Center](#) | [familyresourcectr.org](https://familyresourcectr.org)

