

Talking to Your Kids

- Acknowledge that marijuana, alcohol and tobacco are substances that are out there and that many people use them. Explain that nicotine and prescription drugs are also "abuse-able" and should be treated the same as alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Start talking with your kids at an early age and take time to explain things to your child in basic terms that are easily understandable. Make your child comfortable talking to you about "difficult" topics such as drugs, alcohol and smoking.
- Listen carefully to your child. Educate yourself so you can answer his or her questions. As children get older, their questions get more difficult, so you need to be prepared.
- Peer pressure may play a pivotal role in a child's decision to use drugs, drink or smoke. However, encourage your child to be their own person and make their own decisions.
- Tell your child the truth—that drugs, alcohol and tobacco may make them feel good for a while (by activating brain chemicals). Unfortunately, that feeling is brief and no one can know the true potency or lifetime effects of these substances.
- Try to impress on your child the long-term consequences drinking, smoking or using drugs may have on something they enjoy doing, such as sports, math or writing.
- Point out that adolescents are in a period of life during which they need their brains to operate at full efficiency. These substances can impair brain function.
- Make the point that repeated "chemical activation" will eventually cause people to crave that chemical and want to keep using it even if it hurts them.
- Explain that these substances may dull a painful part of their lives for a brief period, but it will never change or help the underlying situation.
- Write a family "contract" established to make your opinions on drug use, drinking and smoking clear. Be consistent with family rules.