



**EDUCATING TEENAGERS
ABOUT ALCOHOL,
SMOKING AND
CANNABIS**

de druglijn

WORK ON A GOOD RELATIONSHIP

Children grow up

Your child is going to secondary school and will find themselves in a new environment. This is the start of a period of major change, including exposure to smoking, alcohol and cannabis.

Naturally your child will want to feel as if they belong. As a parent you hope that your son or daughter will not be swept along too far as a result. You hope that they are strong enough to make healthy decisions and to set boundaries. You can help your child prepare for this.

The parent's involvement at this stage is essential. You can help your teenager to make healthy choices regarding the consumption of tobacco, alcohol and cannabis. It might surprise you to know that teenagers still take their parents' opinions seriously. Never underestimate the level of influence you have. You probably have much more than you realise. So, what can you do?

These tips can help you:

- - - List your child's qualities
- - - Occasionally make time for a chat
- - - Show an interest in your child
- - - Listen to what interests your child
- - - From time to time tell your child that you are proud of them



A child with a positive self-image is stronger and more self-assured. Self-confidence is important. It helps your child to develop their own opinions and make healthy choices. Parents can encourage this by working on having a good relationship.

V.U.: Frieda Matthys, Vereniging voor Alcohol- en andere Drugproblemen vzw, VAD, Vanderlindenstraat 15, 1030 Brussel – april 2015 - D/2015/6030/9

De DrugLijn is een initiatief van VAD – VAD wordt gefinancierd door de Vlaamse overheid. De DrugLijn financieel steunen kan op rekeningnummer 433-1078042-09. Vanaf € 40 ontvang je een fiscaal attest.

Ontwerp Karolien Snyers - Druk www.epo.be - afbeeldingen www.shutterstock.com - De afbeeldingen in deze brochure zijn fictief. VAD vzw benadrukt dat elke associatie van afgebeelde personen met druggebruik, gezondheidsproblemen of illegale praktijken ongegrond is.



TALKING TO ADOLESCENT CHILDREN ABOUT SMOKING, ALCOHOL AND CANNABIS

It isn't always easy to talk to adolescents, especially, your own. Nevertheless it is important to make time for it.



WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TALK?

Talk about smoking, alcohol and cannabis before your child comes in contact with them. The transition to secondary school is a good time to talk about smoking and alcohol. It's best to wait a little longer before talking about cannabis and other drugs - wait until it comes into your adolescent's environment.

Choose a quiet moment to talk to your child. It is also important not to talk about it too often. That simply comes across as 'nagging'.

WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

It helps to find information in advance. However, you don't have to know everything about smoking, alcohol or cannabis in order to talk to your child.

Teenagers never listen to medical explanations about the harmful effects of alcohol on the liver or tobacco on the lungs. This is far too remote from their everyday lives.

It is better to talk about the impact of using on their actual lives today. For instance getting a hangover, yellowing teeth, not being able to concentrate, or spending too much money. Also mention that tobacco, alcohol and cannabis are more harmful to the health of teenagers than they are to adults.

Explain to your child why a lot of young people start drinking or smoking. They do it to look tough and show that they belong. Teenagers recognise this. Letting them think about it and form their own opinions helps make it easier for them to resist peer pressure.



AN HONEST STORY

Explain why alcohol, tobacco and cannabis are attractive to many adults. Children see that lots of adults enjoy a glass of wine. Never deny this fact and always explain that risks related to drinking affect adults too.

If you are a smoker, you should also say that you're not proud of this fact, and explain how difficult it is to stop once you've started.

If your child says that cannabis also has positive effects, you should agree with them. Explain that the positive feeling soon passes and that after a time an irritating urge develops to start using it again. Apart from that, there are lots of other dangers linked to using cannabis.

NO HORROR STORIES

Never say: "It starts with a joint and before you know it, you'll end up in the gutter!" These kinds of statements have no effect. For a start, they're not credible and very far removed from a young person's experience of the world. Discuss realistic situations that are clearly recognisable to your child. Discuss them when the situation demands it. For instance, your child may want to go out for the first time and you have noticed that one of their friends is already smoking cigarettes, or that a classmate has been caught with cannabis.



SET A GOOD EXAMPLE

Children see how their parents deal with smoking and drinking. This impacts on their own behaviour. Children of parents who smoke or drink are more likely to do the same. This is also the reason why parents should drink responsibly. For example, never drink and drive, as this will raise the likelihood of your children doing likewise.

Talk about your own consumption and explain that there is a difference between an adult and a growing teenager. The body and brain of children and adolescents are still developing, and for that reason young people are more vulnerable to the health and addiction risks related to alcohol, tobacco and cannabis.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SET BOUNDARIES?

*“Parenting is about setting boundaries.
Growing up is about testing them.”*

Growing children and adolescents need to have clear boundaries. As a parent you must state what is and what is not possible. This allows your child to know how far they can go. Setting boundaries creates clarity and stability. It is important that young people learn to deal with being told ‘no’. This prepares them for setbacks later in life.

PUSHING BOUNDARIES AND FLIRTING WITH RISKS

Adolescents can be difficult sometimes. Experimenting with tobacco, alcohol or cannabis might form part of this. But that doesn’t mean it will actually cause problems later on. As a parent it is important that you do not immediately panic when it happens. The majority of adolescents get through this experimental stage without any problems.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that you should just let them get on with it. Young people live in the present, they think they can do anything. They don’t think about the risks related to their behaviour. That’s why adolescents need to have clear boundaries.

WHERE DO YOU SET THE BOUNDARIES?

- - - Explain to your child why you are setting a specific boundary.
- - - A boundary should be very clear. This helps ensure there are no wrong interpretations or misunderstandings.
- - - Ensure that the boundary applies always and everywhere.
- - - Choose your battles. Being strict about everything no longer works during puberty. Set boundaries you truly believe are important. If you are strict about tobacco, alcohol and cannabis, then you can be slightly more lenient in other areas. For instance you could ask your child not to drink at a party, but allow them to stay out later in return.



BROKEN AGREEMENTS?

WHERE DO YOU SET THE BOUNDARIES?

You should strive for non-use with respect to cannabis and tobacco. Very few people start smoking after 18 years of age. So try to postpone the moment they start smoking for as long as possible. In Belgium it is against the law to sell tobacco products to children under 16.

Alcohol consumption should also be delayed for as long as possible. It is against the law for children under 16 to drink alcohol in Belgium. Spirits are prohibited for the under 18s. Teenagers between 16 and 18 years of age are allowed to drink, but with care. They should not drink more than two glasses at a time and no more than two days a week. Drinking should not become a weekly habit.

Setting a strict limit is the clearest way of dealing with this. 'No alcohol' rules leave less room for discussion than 'occasionally', or 'a little'. In addition you can set strict boundaries in the knowledge that adolescents will cross those boundaries anyway.



If your son or daughter breaks an agreement, react clearly. Indicate that a boundary has been crossed and that you disapprove. It is important to remain calm. Start the conversation. Listen carefully to your children without being too judgemental. Why did they break the agreement?

A PUNISHMENT?

- - - Punishment gives your child the opportunity to correct their mistake. Excessive punishments can often have the opposite effect.
- - - Discuss the punishment in advance with your child, so that they know the consequences of breaking the agreement.
- - - Be consistent with punishment, never make exceptions.
- - - The conversation after breaking the agreement is equally important to the actual punishment.

REWARDS WORK MUCH BETTER THAN PUNISHMENTS!

In comparison with the adult brain, the adolescent brain responds much more strongly to positive signals. They also respond less to punishment and disapproval. Did your child respect the boundaries? Acknowledge this and compliment them. This works better than punishing them when boundaries have been crossed.

EXPERIMENTING

WHY DO ADOLESCENTS EXPERIMENT?

Experimenting is part of puberty. The first time a young person tries a cigarette, alcohol or cannabis is often simply an experiment. They do it for fun, to be with friends. In other words they do it for positive reasons. The majority of young people stop after a relatively short period. The vast majority will come out of that phase without too many bruises. However, some young people experience problems or continue using.

SUSPECT SOMETHING?

Bad school grades, new friendships, or major emotional changes? These might be indications that your child is experimenting with smoking, alcohol or cannabis, but these signals are equally typical of puberty in general. So do not draw negative conclusions too early.

Do you still think your child is experimenting? Try talking to them. Start an honest conversation, explain why you are concerned. Discuss what you can see and feel, not what you fear and suspect. Do not play the detective because that will make your child lose any trust they have in you.

SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED?

The level of risk when experimenting with alcohol or drugs depends on many factors. It is not only about the amount of alcohol or the properties of the drug. The context and also your child's personality are equally important. For instance using alcohol or cannabis is much riskier if your child is impulsive and easily influenced, or if they are not feeling happy about themselves. Someone who feels confident and sure of themselves will be able to deal with them better.

So be conscious of your child's personality and how they are feeling. Try to find out why they are experimenting.

Continue talking to them for as long as they are smoking or drinking. Agreements are still needed to set boundaries. Discuss how much your child is allowed to drink and where they can or cannot smoke.

8 TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

for parents

1. Talk and discuss things with your children. This encourages them to think independently. It also makes them less impressionable than children who are always told what to do by their parents.
2. Respect their ideas. Even if they might sound misguided or naïve.
3. Remain calm in conflicts. Serious arguments make less of an impression on an adolescent than calm and reasoned debate.
4. Do not allow yourself to be walked over. Make clear agreements together. Assume that the agreements will be respected.
5. Try to convince your child to postpone the initial consumption for another year. This could be about having their first glass of alcohol at 16 or no smoking until 18. Sometimes postponing it means it never happens.
6. If your child drinks alcohol, make clear agreements. Establish when and how much can be drunk. Young people are vulnerable and alcohol is harmful, especially if they are drinking too much, too often.
7. You should reach agreements even when your child is already smoking. For instance regarding smoking at home. Help your child to become a non-smoker again.
8. It is normal for you to become angry or to panic when you think your child is smoking or using cannabis. It is okay to show this. However, try to calm down afterwards. Calm discussion is also the best option in this situation.

For questions about,

ALCOHOL, DRUGS, PILLS AND GAMBLING

in **DUTCH** or **ENGLISH**, please contact De DrugLijn

Call 078 15 10 20

- - - Mon-Fri: 10am-8 pm. (closed on public holidays)
- - - reduced call charges from the fixed line phone

Make contact via www.druglijn.be

- - - ask your question by email, Skype or chat
- - - you always receive a personal reply

For questions about alcohol, drugs, pills or gambling in **FRENCH**,
please contact
Infor-Drogues

Call 02 227 52 52

- - - Mon-Fri: 8am-10pm. (closed on public holidays) & Sat: 10am-2 pm.

Make contact through www.infordrogues.be

- - - e-answering service

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT SMOKING, SMOKING AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND ALSO SMOKING AND PARENTING:

www.gezondopvoeden.be

www.vlaanderenstoptmetroken.be/ouders

www.kortemettenmetsigaretten.be

www.tabakstop.be (support in Dutch, French and English)

