

For parents, this is a pivotal time in helping teens make positive choices when faced with drugs and alcohol. The average age kids try drugs for the first time is 13. Experts say if your child is 13, you should assume that he or she has been offered drugs or alcohol. But you can help your teen stay healthy and drug-free — and beat the negative statistics about drug use among teens. Kids who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are up to 50 percent less likely to use (2011 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study). Mental health issues sometimes lead to drug use. Talk to your kids about mental health. Young teens may say they don't need your guidance, but they're much more open to it than they let on. Make sure you talk to them about their choices of friends — drug use in teens starts as a social behavior.

### CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. While there is no single reason teens try alcohol and drugs, there are some common issues and influences behind teenage drug and alcohol use. It is important as a parent to understand these reasons and talk to your kids about the dangers of drinking and using drugs along with helping them find healthier alternatives and options. Some top reasons include: peers, family, media, escape, self-medicating, stress, boredom, low self-esteem, instant gratification, and misinformation.
  - You could start the conversation by saying, “I know that the teen years are stressful, what ways do you cope with your stress?” The response can lead to a discussion on good coping skills you can discuss.
  - Ask your child why they feel kids use drugs and/or alcohol.
2. Giving some scenario questions will allow you and your teen an opportunity to explore how to handle difficult situations where drugs and alcohol are involved.
  - Ask your teen, “What would you do if you were in a car and realized the driver has taken drugs or alcohol?”
  - Follow up with, “What if the driver is an adult?”
  - Give them time to come up with solutions on their own and then go over together.
3. Social media most likely plays a role in your teen’s life. Sharing videos, images and memes creates the opportunity for an instantaneous positive feedback loop that can perpetuate poor decision making. It can lead to false beliefs like most teens use drugs, when in fact, most teens don’t use drugs.
  - Ask your teen if they know anyone who has posted a picture of themselves under the influence of drugs or alcohol on social media. If their response is yes, ask them what happened when others saw it, especially if it was a classmate.
  - Try to get your teen to think about their future and what their boundaries are around substance.
4. Ask your teen if they know anyone who has gone to the hospital or had an accident because they were high or drunk.
  - This will give you and your teen an opportunity to talk about the short term consequences of drugs and alcohol which can lead into the long term effects.
  - Discuss the negative effects of drugs and alcohol. Clearly communicate that you do not want your teen using drugs. Talk about the short and long-term effects drugs and alcohol can have on his or her mental and physical health, safety and ability to make good decisions. Explain to your teen that experimenting with drugs or alcohol during this time is risky to their still developing brain.

## CONVERSATION STARTERS (CONTINUED)

5. Ensure that you and your teen are familiar with the Good Samaritan Law. An overview is below:

The Maryland Good Samaritan Law effective October 1, 2015, provides protection from arrest as well as prosecution for certain specific crimes and expands the charges from which people assisting in an emergency overdose situation are immune. If someone calls 911 in an effort to help during an overdose crisis, or they are experiencing an overdose, their parole and probation status will not be affected, and they will now not be arrested, charged, or prosecuted for:

- Possession of a controlled dangerous substance
- Possession or use of drug paraphernalia
- Providing alcohol to minors

6. People often think that prescription and OTC drugs are safer than illicit drugs. But they can be as addictive and dangerous and put users at risk for other adverse health effects, including overdose. Common prescription medications misused are opioids, which are used to treat and relieve pain, depressants, used to relieve anxiety or insomnia, and stimulants, used to treat ADHD.

- Ask the question, “Do you think prescription drugs are safer than illegal drugs?” Even if the answer is no, still talk about the reasons why this is considered a myth.
- Stress the need for them to take personal responsibility for their own health, well-being and personal environment.
- Discuss the dangers of sharing medications and that they should only take medications given to them by you or that are prescribed to them by their doctor.

7. This is an age when your child or their friends may start to have issues with mental health.

- Start a conversation by asking your child what they know about mental health, i.e. depression or anxiety. Use this time to correct misinformation and address stigma.
- Ask your child if any of their friends have talked about feeling “low” or “depressed.”
- Go further and ask your child if they have ever felt “low” or “depressed.”
- Make sure your child knows that they can talk to you about their mental health without judgement.

**ACTIVITIES:**

1. Make a plan of what your teen would do in various situations which should include: what they would do and say, who they will call for help and how they will leave a bad situation in a hurry.
2. Play a game
  - On-line games can be found at <https://www.teens.drugabuse.gov/games>
  - Conversation Exchange Game at <http://www.harfordcountymd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7788>
3. Have your teen make a list of common stressors among adolescents. Ask them to share ways that teens may deal with each of those stressors. Then group the stressors into helpful and hurtful coping strategies. Discuss how drug use can be a harmful coping strategy and how it can be a stressor itself.
4. Ask your teen to develop a list of ways to “get high” without using drugs. Some ideas are; playing sports, laughing with friends, listening to music, watching TV or movies, doing volunteer work, dancing, singing, acting... following a passion.

**FACTS:**

- The average age kids try drugs for the first time is 13.
- According to the 2015 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 8.1% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, 14.5% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, 21% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders and 32.9% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders in Harford County reported regularly participating in binge drinking.
- 4 out of 5 heroin addictions begin with the misuse of prescription pain killers.
- According to the 2015 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 8.9% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, 12.4% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, 18.1% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders, and 20.5% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported taking a prescription drug without a doctor’s prescription one or more times during the past 30 days of the survey.
- 9 out of 10 people with substance problems started using by age 18.
- Teen abuse of prescription (Rx) pain medicine, also known as opioids, usually starts in two ways. Some teens start abusing it at a party or with friends because they’re curious or think it will make them feel good. Others start taking it legitimately when prescribed by a doctor after an injury or dental procedure. In some cases, legitimate use turns to dependence, abuse, addiction and then heroin use.
- Substances in your teen’s world can include: Tobacco, alcohol, prescription drugs such as pain killers, depressants, and stimulants, inhalants and illicit drugs such as marijuana, synthetic drugs, heroin, LSD, mushrooms, cocaine/crack, GHB, rohypnol and ketamine.
- The CASA Columbia 2011 survey found that 40% of all teens surveyed have seen pictures on Facebook, MySpace, or other social networking sites of kids getting drunk, passed out, or using drugs. Half of teens who have seen pictures of kids drunk, passed out, or using drugs on Facebook and other social networking sites first saw such pictures when they were 13 years of age or younger; more than 90% first saw such pictures when they were 15 or younger.

**SOURCES/RESOURCES**

[www.drugfree.org/](http://www.drugfree.org/)

[www.teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts](http://www.teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts)

[www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/what-to-do-if-your-teen-or-young-adult-has-problem-drugs](http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/what-to-do-if-your-teen-or-young-adult-has-problem-drugs)

[www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts.html](http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts.html)

[www.bha.health.maryland.gov/OVERDOSE PREVENTION/Pages/Good-Samaritan-Law.aspx](http://www.bha.health.maryland.gov/OVERDOSE_PREVENTION/Pages/Good-Samaritan-Law.aspx)

<https://www.today.com/parents/experts-explain-how-talk-about-suicide-kids-age-t130589>

[https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families and Youth/Facts for Families/FFF-Guide/Talking-To-Kids-About-Mental-Illnesses-084.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Talking-To-Kids-About-Mental-Illnesses-084.aspx)

<http://www.sptsusa.org/parents/talking-to-your-kid-about-suicide/>

<https://www.weareteachers.com/10-conversation-starters-spark-authentic-classroom-discussions-drugs-alcohol/>

<https://drugfree.org/>