

Children in this age group are still tied to family and eager to please but they're also beginning to explore their individuality. In preteens, they tend to give their friends' opinions a great deal of power while, at the same time, they're starting to question their parents' views and messages. Your advice may be challenged but it will be heard and will stay with your child much more than he or she will admit. Above all, make sure your child knows that they can talk to you

### CONVERSATION STARTERS:

1. In this age group, kids may have heard their peers talk about drugs and alcohol. Start the conversation with, "I know that in middle school kids may talk about drugs and alcohol, have you heard anyone in school talk about getting drunk or high?"
  - It is important to listen to their responses. You will learn a great deal about what they are thinking and what is going on in their environment.
  - Follow up with, "did you tell anyone about what you heard?"
    - ◇ Discuss who would be people they could talk to if they heard someone talking about drugs and alcohol.
    - ◇ Talk about why it is important to tell someone.
2. Adolescents experiment with drugs or continue taking them for several reasons, including: to fit in, to feel good, to feel better, to do better, and for curiosity.
  - Start the conversation with asking your child why they think some kids use drugs and or drink alcohol.
  - Discuss healthier options to help someone feel good or feel better such as exercising or talking to someone about how they are feeling. Be a role model and use positive coping skills to handle stress.
  - Good communication between parents and children is the foundation of strong family relationships. Developing good communication skills helps parents catch problems early, support positive behavior, and stay aware of what is happening in their children's lives.
3. 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.

**CONVERSATION STARTERS (CONTINUED)**

4. Kids are more likely to be offered drugs and/or alcohol by someone they know. This is an important time to make a plan of what they will do or say if a friend offered drugs and/or alcohol. Start the conversation by asking them directly, “What would you do if a friend offered you drugs and/or alcohol”
  - Know who your child’s friends are and who they spend time with.
  - Assist your child with building up their skills and strategies for avoiding drugs and alcohol and way they can get out of a difficult situation.
  - Develop a plan with your child to have a code word they can text to you if they want to get out of an uncomfortable situation.
  - Parents, you are the biggest influence in your child's life. That’s why it’s important to talk regularly with them. Approach your conversation with openness and empathy and be sure to clearly communicate that you do not want them using drugs or alcohol. Remind your child of your support and be sure to listen to what he or she has to say.
  
5. There may be a time where about what they would do if they found out one of their closest friends were using drugs.
  - Make a list of people they could talk to.
  - Reassure them that they are not tattling/ratting on their friend rather that they are helping to save their future and their life.
  
6. 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. Role play scenarios that allow your child to practice refusing drugs or alcohol.
  - Assist your child with coming up with ideas of how to get out of the situation. Good refusal skills for this age include:
    - ◇ Have your child blame you and tell the person, *"No my mom (or dad, aunt, etc.) will kill me if I smoke a cigarette."*
    - ◇ Have your child offer a healthy alternative such as, *"I want to go to the park, why don't we go do that instead."* Tell your child, 'if you suggest something else to do, it makes it easier for your friend to go along with you. If you can't change your friend's mind, walk away, but let your friend know he or she is welcome to join you. Say something like *"I'm going to the park. If you change your mind, come on over."*
2. Play a game
  - On-line games can be found at: <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/games>
  - Conversation Exchange Game at <http://www.harfordcountymd.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7788>

**FACTS:**

- Kids are more likely to be offered drugs and/or alcohol by someone they know. In addition, kids who don't know what to say or how to get away are more likely to give in to peer-pressure.
- According to the 2015 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 4.7% of Harford County 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 5.9% of Harford County 7<sup>th</sup> graders, and 8.7% of Harford County 8<sup>th</sup> graders self -reported they regularly drink alcohol.
- 1 in 6 teens in America has tried huffing-inhaling fumes from everyday items like nail polish remover, hair spray, and cooking spray. Inhalants are often among the first drugs that young adolescents use. In fact, they are one of the few classes of drugs that are used more by younger adolescents than older ones. Inhalant use can become chronic and continue into adulthood.
- Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit substance among adolescents.
- Data from the 2015 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey revealed 2.3% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 4.5% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders and 9.8% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders in Harford County reported using Marijuana one or more times during the past 30 days of the survey.
- Marijuana is estimated to produce addiction in 1 in 11 of those who use it at least once. It increases to about 1 in 6 for users who start in their teens.
- Substances in your child's world can include: Tobacco, Alcohol, Ritalin, Adderall, Inhalants, and Marijuana.

**SOURCES/RESOURCES**

<http://www.drugfree.org/>

<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/parents/drugs-and-your-kids>

<http://kidshealth.org/en/kids/know-drugs.html>

<http://www.toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov/tweens/default.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/>