

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR 13 TO 15 YEAR OLD



Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids. But, when tackling some of life’s tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your high-school child.

Scenario

Your teen is starting high school — and you want to remind him that he doesn’t have to give in to peer pressure to drink or use drugs.

What to Say

You must be so excited about starting high school. It’s going to be a ton of fun, and we want you to have a great time. But we also know there’s going to be some pressure to start drinking, abusing medicine, smoking pot or taking other drugs. A lot of people feel like this is just what high-school kids do.

But, it’s not what you have to do. Not all high school kids drink or use drugs. Many don’t, which means it won’t make you weird to choose not to drink or use drugs, either.

You can still have a lot of fun if you don’t drink or use drugs. It is important to seek out these other kids who are making good choices, and be brave about trying new activities or making new friends.

You’ll have a lot of decisions to make about what you want to do in high school and you might even make some mistakes. Just know that you can talk to us about anything, anytime — even if you DO make a mistake or feel stuck in a situation that you need help to get out of. We won’t freak out. We’ll figure out a way to help you. We want you to count on us to help you make smart decisions and stay safe, okay?

Scenario

Every time you ask your teen how his day was, you get a mumbled “Whatever, it was okay” in return.

What to Say

Skip asking general questions like, “How’s school?” or questions that only need a yes/no answer. Instead, ask more specific questions on topics that interest both you and your teen (“Tell me about the pep rally yesterday.” “Who did you have lunch with today?” “Fill me in on your Chemistry lab test.”)

You can also use humor and even some gentle sarcasm, to get the conversation flowing by making your child laugh and start opening up a bit. To show your teen that you want to know what it’s like in his or high school, try this with an exaggerated playful and light tone, “I’m thinking of calling the principal for permission to record a reality-show of your high school so I could see what it’s really like for you every day.” It can also be helpful to share a brief anecdote revealing something about your day to model opening up, and let your teen experience how it feels good to connect.

The Hidden in Plain Sight Project is brought to you by the Camanche-DeWitt Coalition and the Gateway ImpACT Coalition. We want to encourage you to talk to your kids about alcohol and drugs. Kids who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are significantly less likely to use drugs. For more information, please contact us at 563-241-4371.

Scenario

Your teen has started to hang out with kids you don't know — and dropped his old friends.

What to Say

It seems like you are hanging with a different crowd than you have in the past. Is something going on with your usual friends? Is there a problem with [old friends' names] or are you just branching out and meeting some new kids? Tell me about your new friends. What are they like? What do they like to do? What do you like about them?

Scenario

Your high schooler comes home smelling of alcohol or cigarette smoke for the first time.

What to Say

“The response should be measured, quiet and serious — not yelling, shouting or overly emotional,” says parenting expert and author Marybeth Hicks. “Your child should realize that this isn't just a frustrating moment like when he doesn't do a chore you asked for; it's very big, very important and very serious.”

Say, “I'm really upset that you're smoking/drinking. I need to get a handle on how often this has been happening and what your experiences have been so far. I get that you're worried about being in trouble, but the worst part of that moment is over — I know that you're experimenting. I love you and care about you. Your health and well-being are very important to me. Let's talk about this. I need you to be honest with me. So for starters, tell me about what happened tonight...”

This information is taken from the Partnership for Drug Free Kids-Parent Toolkit:

<http://www.drugfree.org/the-parent-toolkit/age-by-age-advice/13-15-year-old-what-to-say/>

We're here to help: Our [Parents Toll-Free Helpline 1-855-DRUGFREE \(1-855-378-4373\)](http://www.drugfree.org) is a nationwide support service that offers assistance to parents who want to talk to someone about their child's drug use and drinking.