

Preventing & Responding to Teen Substance Use

The good news is that there are things that you can do to reduce risks and promote health, safety and well-being for your teen!

Early substance use is a significant risk factor for addiction: The majority of those who have substance use disorder started using before age 18 and developed their disorder by age 20.

The Science says: Parents Matter

Research shows that teens with parents who talk to their kids about substance use risks early and often are significantly less likely to use drugs than those who do not have these conversations at home.

Talk early and often, in developmentally appropriate ways, about substance use and why it matters. ([SAMHSA Talk. They Hear You Campaign](#))

What's in your substance use prevention toolbox?

Tool #1: Stay Connected! The *Connecticut School Health Survey* found that teens who reported having meals at home with family, feeling love and support from parents, and having parents who asked about their whereabouts when not at home showed the lowest prevalence of risky behaviors including alcohol and drug use, motor vehicle safety and risky sexual behaviors. (CT DMHAS)

Tool #2: Set Limits and have clear & consistent rules: Be clear to your teen that you don't want them drinking or using drugs. "Our expectation is that you don't use drugs or alcohol." (See *If You Suspect Teen Drug Use* for tips on responding when you suspect your child is using drugs or alcohol)

Tool #3: Have rules, but not too many. Be clear and consistent about the limits you do set. Teens will push back: expect it and stay calm when they do. "...with most teens, if parents don't overreact to each transgression but keep their rules in place, they will have a teen who obeys the rules, if imperfectly, and the rules, though tattered in places, will hold up." Anthony Wolfe, PhD, author of *I'd Listen to My Parents If They'd Just Shut Up.*"

Tool #4: Share power when you can: Involve teens in setting rules and decision making as much as possible; shared power does not mean equal power, but young people do best when their opinions are respected as they are guided toward maturity. [Search Institute shared power video](#)

Tool #5: Adapt rules and limits as your child ages and matures. The curfew for your 13 year old will be different than the curfew for your 17 year old. Be open to revisit rules and expectations as your teen gets older, allowing for age appropriate autonomy, especially if your teen has shown good judgment.

Tool #6: Safety First: Consider a safety 'code word': Choose a word or phrase that your teen can text or say to tell you they need help getting out of a risky situation. [The Code Word Strategy](#) and for teens: [Escape Tricky Situations With a Code Word](#) (Parentandteen.com) Tell your teen that you want them to come to you if they are unsafe for any reason and need help.

Tool #7: Encourage healthy habits & self care: Focus on health and wellness, and support your teen in developing healthy habits re: eating, sleeping and screen time/social media. [11 self care tips for teens and young adults](#)

Tool #8: Find opportunities to educate your teen about the risks of drug and alcohol use including the dangers of taking prescription drugs that aren't prescribed, the danger of mixing drugs, and the risks of using street drugs. Find facts to share with your teen: [teens.drugabuse.gov/teens/drug-facts](#)

Tool #9: Get curious about your teen's experience: Deeper understanding leads to deeper connection **and** increased influence: What makes it appealing to use? How can you get that need met some other way (for example, marijuana use to help relax or alcohol use to ease social anxiety.)

Tool #10: Encourage healthy risk taking: Taking risks is a natural part of teens' identity development. Guide your teen toward healthy challenges to help them satisfy a healthy desire for risk-taking and bolster their confidence and leadership skills.

Find more information about commonly used substances at:

Drugfree.org's comprehensive [Drug Guide for Parents](#)

OR [NIDA's Commonly Used Drugs chart](#)

Suggested Resources

- [Partnership to End Addiction](#) has many great resources including:
 - Parent helpline: Text CONNECT to 55753 or [schedule a call with a parent support specialist](#)
 - [Marijuana Talk Kit: How to talk to teens about marijuana use and risks](#)
 - [Info. for prevention, intervention, treatment, recovery](#)
 - [A free parent Skill-Building Course Addressing Teen Substance Use](#)
- [SAMHSA Talk. They Hear You: Parent resources](#)
- [NIDA for Teens: Drug facts, addiction videos, & more](#)
- [Stop Medicine Abuse: resources to prevent teen cough medicine abuse](#)
- [Newtown Parent Connection: regional Hope & Support Groups for parents concerned about their teen or young adult's substance use.](#)
- [CT 24 hour substance use treatment helpline resource line: substance use treatment. \(800\)-563-4086](#)
- [The 20 Minute parent guide from Center for Motivation and Change, for parents concerned about a teen or young adult's substance use](#)