

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Are Your Kids Prepared To Handle Drug Temptations?

from the American Counseling Association

It can be difficult for parents to talk seriously with their children about certain issues, especially sex or drugs. And while the sex talk may get handled just fine (or not) by the school's health education class, it's essential that your child be prepared for potential drug encounters because they are going to happen.

When's the right time to begin drug discussions with your children? Experts advise that it's well before they become teenagers. Children as young as five are able to comprehend that certain things are bad for them. This is when you need to explain that many things, including cigarettes, alcohol, common household products and the parents' medications, are all drugs and can all be harmful to them.

If you start such discussions early, it becomes easier to add additional age-appropriate information as your child grows. Studies find that children as young as eight are commonly having their first drug experience, usually inhaling common household products. Even fairly young children might be tempted to try one of those pills that they found in Mom's purse.

An important step in assisting your kids is helping them develop a plan of action for dealing with drug situations. Kids want to fit in and belong, and peer pressure often plays a major role in getting a child to try a drug for the first time, whether it's a cigarette, alcohol, marijuana, or pills.

If the "cool" kids are the ones doing some kind of drugs, encourage your child to discuss how he or she would feel and react if pressured to join in. Try role playing so your child can get a feel for what his or her reactions might be. Be supportive and let your child know you understand how difficult such situations can be. But he or she must also understand how important it is to be able to say "no."

Yes, your child will probably have questions about your own experiences with drugs, smoking or drinking. While open, honest communications is best, be aware that some adolescents might feel that if you did something, there's no reason they can't, too.

Your local health department or library has material about talking to kids about drugs. And if you suspect your child is being exposed to drug usage, or may already be experimenting or using, talk to your school's counselor about what to do or where to get help.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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