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## 10 Tips to Prevent Teen Chemical Use

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*Parents are often worried about whether their children will start or may already be using substances such as marijuana, nicotine, alcohol, and others - including the abuse of prescription drugs. So, what can we do to prevent our kids from using substances?*

*Here are some parent and caregiver tips that have been shown to minimize the possibility of our kids exploring substance use.*

### 1- Communication

Conversations with our kids isn't about lecturing and instilling fear. It's about inviting conversation about the pressures and influences our children encounter when it comes to alcohol and other substances, actively listening to their perspectives, and guiding and supporting them as they develop their moral compass for decision-making. Encourage your child to have open, honest conversations with you by staying calm while they are sharing.

### 2- Encouragement

Consistent encouragement helps youth feel good about themselves and gives them confidence to try new activities, develop new friendships, explore their creativity, and tackle difficult tasks. Let them know they have good ideas and to remind them that they are important.

### 3- Eat together whenever possible

A comfortable, natural way to express interest in our children's lives and encouraging conversation is by having dinner together each night. If that's not possible, set a realistic number such as three nights a week. In fact, the research indicates that the more often children eat dinner with their parents/guardians, the less likely they are to smoke, drink, or use substances.

Stuck in a dinner rut? [Choosemyplate.gov/](http://Choosemyplate.gov/) offers recipes, plus tips and tools for eating healthy on a budget.

### 4- Talk early, talk often

Research has shown that as parents, we are the most influential source of information our children have. Talking about smoking cigarettes, vaping, drinking alcohol, and using other substances is what's most likely to make a difference in whether your child gets into these things. Parents have the most influence **before** their kid starts using.

It's ideal to start talking to our kids at a young age and continue the conversation. This way it's an ongoing dialogue as opposed to a single event that's checked off the list of "talks" to have.

### 5- Know it's not too late

If your kid is in their teens, and you haven't started a dialogue about substances and alcohol – this is a perfect time to start. Study after study shows that even during teen years, parents have enormous

influence on their children's behavior. Use news events, TV shows, or real life occurrences as teaching opportunities. Excellent resources on specific tips for these conversations can be found at [Kids Health](#) and [Partnership for Drug-Free Kids](#).

### **6- Set limits and supervision**

Our kids will likely not verbalize this, but rules and boundaries make kids feel loved and secure. Thus, it's important to set realistic expectations for your child's behavior.

Ensure your child understands the rules, establish appropriate consequences for breaking rules, and be ready to follow through. Research shows that parents are most effective in setting limits when they follow up right away. Youth are more likely to follow rules if they know parents are checking up on them and will enforce consequences consistently.

### **7- Honor and model healthy choices**

Being a parent sure makes us aware of our own behavior. Our kids will be more affected by what they see us do than what they hear us say. If we do drink or use marijuana – whether in front of our kid or not – they are likely going to call us out on this. Use it as an opportunity to reflect on your own patterns and reasons for using such as 'Am I modeling drinking in response to stress?'

### **8- Focus on your child**

Perhaps your kid will ask if you used as a kid. Whether your answer is yes or no, focus the discussion on your child and why they're asking. Make it about how *their* choices about how substance use will affect *their* future. Before disclosing anything, find out why your child is asking the question. 'What makes you ask? Did you see or hear something that made you wonder if I ever smoked pot?'

There's no hard and fast rule about how you should answer your kid's question about your own history of use. What to tell your child varies from family to family – it depends on the situation of the child (age, risk factors), and the experience of parents.

### **9- Trust your instincts**

Trust your instincts and use your own style in carrying out some of the approaches above. Remember, don't underestimate your power as a parent - parents are the messengers that their children are likeliest to listen to.

### **10- Get support**

If you have concerns or knowledge about your child's chemical use, the South Washington County, Stillwater and Oakdale/Maplewood districts have a partnership with the Youth Service Bureau. Each district has a Chemical Health Specialist. Call the Front Desk or the Counseling Office at your school to schedule an appointment.

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*Youth Service Bureau, Inc. helps youth and families learn the skills they need to be more successful at home, in school and throughout the community.*

Programs include youth-focused family counseling, diversion services, chemical health support and youth & family education. Learn more by calling one of our three locations or visiting [ysb.net](http://ysb.net)

**Cottage Grove** 651-458-5224 | **Stillwater** 651-439-8800 | **Woodbury** 651-735-9534 | [ysb.net](http://ysb.net)