

## BEFORE YOU TALK

Starting this discussion might be uncomfortable for you or your child, but here are some tips to help make the conversation a little easier and effective.

- Pick a neutral time when you can both focus on what you're discussing
- Be prepared - make sure you have some background knowledge on the topic. The first two sessions of this toolkit- "Learn the Facts" and "How Medication Works" can help.
- Be open and calm
- Limit distractions
- Go at a pace that is comfortable for both of you. If either of you get overwhelmed, take a break.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

You may want to have a discussion with your child about this important issue but aren't quite sure where to start. Keep the lines of communication open by engaging in regular conversations. One-on-one conversations may not always yield the results you would like. Be patient and keep initiating conversations.

Here are some possible conversation starters:

**There's a lot in the news lately about teens who are misusing prescription drugs. How much do you know about this? Do you know if kids at your school are taking prescription drugs like OxyContin® and Percocet® that were not prescribed for them?**

- Sometimes teens will try to opt out of this conversation because they don't want to share specific information about friends or peers. In this case, you can be ready with a story about your own teenage years and someone you knew or something that happened pertaining to drug use during that time. Talk about how

you felt, and then ask what they would have thought had they experienced something similar. This is also an opportunity to talk about why this behavior is so dangerous.

**I just heard a report about drug use by teenagers, and I wanted to talk to you about what it said...**

- Briefly summarize the report and talk honestly about how it makes you feel. Your child may be reluctant to talk about specific people they know, so make it clear that you are not fishing for information to get someone in trouble.

**There is so much on the news today about people misusing prescription drugs. Are you aware of what can happen when people misuse medicine prescribed by doctors?**

- If your child is not presently taking any medication, they may question the need to discuss this issue. Explain that people who misuse prescription drugs often don't have a prescription. Friends and family can supply the drugs—intentionally or inadvertently, when people leave old prescriptions in their medicine cabinets.

**I see that your school has been taking part in a drug prevention program. There is so much in the news right now, and I am not sure I understand all of it. What have you learned from this program?**

- This approach can be useful for children who are reluctant to talk about their personal feelings or relationships. Get the conversation started by asking your child to explain factual or scientific knowledge—for example, how opioids relieve pain and cause addiction—and listen for opportunities to ask follow-up questions.

## PRACTICE REFUSAL SKILLS

Once you have opened the lines of communication, you have the opportunity to reinforce good decisions. One strategy is to help arm your child with refusal skills to avoid participating in high-risk behaviors. Practicing effective communication can give your child the confidence to remove themselves from uncomfortable environments.

Here are three sets of refusal skills your child could use:

### ○ Direct Refusal

Introduce the situation of a friend asking your child to come to a party that they need to bring a pill to for entry. Think of firm and convincing resistance strategies with your child. Keep responses short and simple. For example, your child might say, "No, thanks, I don't want to" or "No, thanks."

### ○ Exit the Situation

Present the situation of a friend offering your child a pill to help with a headache or muscle ache. Help your child brainstorm strategies for exiting the situation when the friend persists. For example, your child might say, "I have to get back to class" or "I need to make a phone call." [Choose your Path](#) provides videos that can help your child practice making decisions about prescription drug misuse.

### ○ Rely on Help

Present the situation that your child's friend suggests trying some pills that will make watching a movie more fun. Strategize with your child how to firmly say no and leave. For example, your child might casually go to the restroom and call or text you. You might even set a code word that your child can text that will communicate they need you to get them quickly.

Invite your child to list the strategies you practiced and order them based on their comfort level with each strategy.



## CHOOSING FRIENDS

Teens who hang around with others who are known to use drugs might also be at increased risk, as might teens from families where drug abuse or misuse is present. It's important to know who your child is friends with. It's important to give your child the tools they need to be aware of who they spend their time with and surround themselves with.

First, help your child identify values/attributes (i.e. - honest, funny, integrity, etc.) they possess and those they appreciate in others. Talk to them about things they like to do and the importance of forming relationships with people who also enjoy those same activities. Here are some questions you can ask to open up the conversation on friendships:

- What do you think makes someone a good friend? Why?
- Who do you think is a good friend? Why?
- What make you a good friend?

Here are some questions you can use to help your child identify if their current friendships are healthy or not:

- Why are you friends with him/her?
- Do you feel good when you are around them?
- Do you trust them?
- Do you have things in common? What are they?
- Can you be yourself around them?

While it can be hard for your child to let friends go, it is important for them to learn to identify friendships with those who have common interests and values as them. If your child indicates their friend group may not be the right one for them, help them to focus on the positives in their life and identify others in their class/school they can form new friendships with.

## COPING WITH ANGER AND STRESS

Uncomfortable emotions such as stress and anger are two of the leading reasons why people use substances. It's important that you understand that stress and anger are perfectly normal things to feel and we can choose the way we react to those emotions.

First, talk with your child about how anger and stress can feel physically. For example, you can have increased heart rate, become sweaty, racing thoughts, teeth grinding, etc.

Next, talk with your child about times they have felt these emotions and different situations that can cause these emotions for them. Remind them that those are perfectly normal things to feel and that it is helpful to identify ways to calm down when we are feeling stress or anger.

Ways to cope with anger and stress:

- **Deep breathing** – Walk your child through a deep breathing exercise - have them breathe in for a count of four, hold for a count of four, and breathe out for a count of four. Repeat as necessary.
- **Meditation** – Meditation is the act of sitting straight up in a comfortable position, repeating a positive mantra, and focusing on breathing. There are a lot of phone apps available which walk you through meditation.
- **Journaling** – Your child can have their own journal to write down their thoughts and feelings or you can have a journal together where you write back and forth to each other.
- **Physical activity** – Physical activity releases endorphins which are the “feel good” chemicals of the brain. Encourage your child to go outside and do a physical activity they enjoy.
- **Be present** – This technique is intended to make you aware of the things around you. Have your child identify three things they can currently see, hear, taste, smell, and feel.
- **Listen to relaxing music** – Help your child to identify music that is relaxing to them that they can play to help them calm down and think more clearly.

These are just some ideas for calming down, come up with a list with your child of techniques that they've tried and liked to cope with stress and anger.

## VALUE OF GOOD HEALTH

Finally, it's important to discuss with your child the importance and benefits of good health. Talk with them about their physical, mental, and emotional health and how maintaining each of these is important in their well-being.

Understanding their health and how the chemicals we put in our bodies can affect our overall health can help them in their decision making.

When discussing the decisions they make regarding substances, discuss it on a continuum of healthy versus unhealthy rather than right or wrong.

Finally, have your child set some goals regarding their physical, emotional, or mental health. Having goals to work towards is a protective factor against your child trying or using substances.