

Tobacco, Drugs and Adolescents

Two of the more common concerns for parents of adolescents are tobacco and drugs. The pressure to experiment with these two substances can come from friends and peers. If you suspect your child is using these substances, open a discussion about the dangers involved with using drugs and tobacco. Here are some key points you should try to emphasize:

"My daughter smokes behind my back. How do I convince her to quit?"

Consequences from smoking–

Smoking tobacco can turn into a life-long addiction that can be extremely hard to break. Discuss with your adolescent some of the more unattractive physical qualities that smokers have, including bad breath, stained teeth, and a long-term cough. Addiction also leads to decreased physical activity and cancer.

Smokeless tobacco–

"Chew" or "snuff" can also lead to nicotine addiction and causes the same health problems as smoking cigarettes. Oral wounds or sores also form and may not heal easily. Smokeless tobacco can also lead to cancer.

If you suspect your teen or preteen is smoking or using smokeless tobacco, talk to your pediatrician. Arrange for your child to visit his or her pediatrician, who will want to discuss the risks associated with smoking and the best ways to quit before it becomes a lifelong habit. Smokers young and old often are more likely to listen to advice from their doctor than from others.

"I am afraid some of my son's friends have offered him drugs. How can I help him to make the right decision?"

Pressures–

Your child may be interested in using drugs other than tobacco, including alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine, to fit in or as a way to deal with the pressures of adolescence. Try to help your adolescent build his or her self-confidence or self-esteem. This will help your child to resist the pressure to use drugs. Encourage your adolescent to "vent" emotions and troubles through conversations and physical activity rather than by getting "high."

Setting examples–

Parents should set examples at home by limiting the use of alcohol and not using illegal drugs. Encourage your adolescent to participate in leisure and outside activities to stay away from the peer pressure of drinking and drugs. Talk with your son or daughter about healthy choices.