



## **Drugs and Alcohol: Just Say No**

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***When your child reaches secondary school - maybe sooner - he'll come across alcohol and drugs. He may be curious, and interested in trying new experiences. His friends may be getting drunk at weekends.***

***Or smoking spliffs after school. Or taking E at parties. 'Just Say No!' is seldom enough. But what you do and say can have a real impact. As he grows up, he will look to you for guidance and support.***

**Communication...** one of the keys is simply talking and listening - encouraging him to feel confident in telling you his stuff. This way drugs and alcohol can be discussed openly and honestly before becoming a problem. And if he does come home drunk or stoned one night you can then discuss it within the family.

**Big 'em up...** what dads think about their children affects how they feel about themselves (and there's a strong link between low self-esteem and drug and alcohol problems in later life). Do your best to make her feel good about herself. Remind her how much you value and love her. If she feels valued, loved and supported, it's easier to make healthier choices as she grows up.

**Have fun...** children are less likely to develop drug or alcohol problems if they adopt healthy lifestyles when young. Do fun active things with your child which you might both enjoy - football, cricket, cycling, fishing, climbing. It's money in the bank - that pays huge dividends in future.

**Do as I say and as I do...** a no-brainer really. If you always have a glass in one hand and a spliff in the other, your words of caution won't be taken seriously. So, think about your own behaviour and change it if you need to. This speaks louder than anything you might say.

**Boundry setting...** children look to their dads for guidance about what is right and wrong. Set clear behaviour boundaries about what is expected from her and acceptable to you. By setting limits, she is more likely to set them for herself in later life.

**Problem solving** - children who feel able to shape their own future are less likely to get involved in drugs and alcohol. Helping your child to make important decisions and solve problems for himself will give him valuable foundations for life.

## Talking drugs and drink

**When to start?** Early in primary school. He will already be formulating ideas and receiving messages on the topic long before he's 10. The first drink and drugs conversations should be between the ages of 5 - 7. Find out what he knows and take it from there.

**Grab the bull by the horns (gently)...** by taking charge of the drink and drugs messages you want your child to receive you will help ensure that a firm foundation is laid before other influences start to affect your child's perceptions.

**Papa don't preach...** a finger-wagging lecture will only make him switch off. Instead, ask open questions and invite him to share his own thoughts and feelings. Listen to what he might be trying to tell you, even if it's not what you want to hear.

**Keep your emotions in check...** drugs and alcohol are tough subjects because of the concern you have for your child. Keep calm and clear about what you want say and try not to make instant judgments about what your child may tell you. You don't want him to clam up.

**A conversation is for life not just Christmas...** there's a temptation to have the one 'The Drugs and Alcohol Conversation' and hope for the best. Keep the topic live and open.

**Am I a hypocrite?** - some dads are wary about talking drink or drugs because of their own past experiences. It might help to share the fact you smoked a few spliffs at university or got outrageously drunk at a wedding. You have to keep the discussion within reality - your child is likely to know if you are lying.

**But it's so not about you...** don't make the conversation all about you (and whatever you do, don't boast about your wild youth). Allow your child space to discuss his own experiences - and chip in with your own only when you think it might be helpful.

**Content over style...** focus on what your child is trying to tell you rather than her grammar or manners. Not only will you take the focus away from the important topic, your child will also be less likely to want to talk to you about their concerns around drugs or alcohol.

## Dads who listen do:

- **Relax...** if you try too hard you'll feel self-conscious and put him off
- **Concentrate...** it is easy to get distracted - listening can be hard work
- **Repeat what you've heard.** This helps her feel he's being listened to and helps you to check you are hearing what she's trying to tell you.

## Dads who listen don't:

- **Don't share your own experience before your child is through talking about his own** - otherwise the conversation becomes about you and not about him
- **Don't judge...** your disapproval will shut her up very quickly
- **Don't appear distracted...** by looking around, moving away or interrupting

## The knowledge

Make sure you are informed about drugs and alcohol and their effects:

### Adfam

Works with and for families affected by someone else's drugs or alcohol use.  
T: 020 7928 8898 W: [www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

### DrugScope

Tel: Drug information, research and publications, and a database of drug treatment providers.  
T: 020 7928 1211  
W: [www.drugscope.org.uk](http://www.drugscope.org.uk)

### Fathers Direct

The national information centre on fatherhood.  
T: 0845 634 1328  
W: [www.fathersdirect.com](http://www.fathersdirect.com)

### FRANK

For anyone concerned about drug misuse. Provides information about drugs and local services  
T: 0800 77 66 00; specialist service for the deaf on 0800 917 8765 (Textphone).  
W: [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

### Parentline Plus

Support/information for fathers and mothers  
T: 0808 800 2222 (24 hr helpline) or textphone 0800 783 6783  
W: [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

### Websites

[www.bbc.co.uk/parenting](http://www.bbc.co.uk/parenting)  
[www.practicalparent.org.uk](http://www.practicalparent.org.uk)  
[www.raisingkids.co.uk](http://www.raisingkids.co.uk)  
[www.tsa.uk.com](http://www.tsa.uk.com) (all about teenagers)  
[www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)

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