Talking to your middle school-aged child about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
Talking to your middle school-aged child about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs:

A 10-STEP GUIDE FOR PARENTS

STEP #1  Learn why you need to talk
STEP #2  Get ready to talk: A quiz
STEP #3  Be prepared to answer questions about your smoking, drinking, or medicine use
STEP #4  Know the facts before you start talking
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STEP #6  Make family rules and keep them
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The examples are fictional, and the photos are not intended to represent the persons in the scenarios.
As a parent, you have a strong say over your children’s choices. Talking to them can help them make the right decisions about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Many parents are surprised to learn that setting rules can positively affect their kids’ futures.

When your children go to middle school (grades 6 to 8), they face many new challenges. They want to try new things. They want to fit in. Their friends may pressure them to do things they may not feel good about.

Remember, no matter how prepared you are, the chance to talk could happen when you don’t expect it. Your child could start asking questions at any time. This booklet will help you be ready to answer their questions when they ask them.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD STAY AWAY FROM ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND OTHER DRUGS:

• Talk about what they like to do and what could happen if they drink alcohol, use tobacco, or take drugs. For example, they can’t do as well in sports or could get into a car accident. They could get into trouble at school or with the police. They could get addicted to tobacco, alcohol, or another drug and find it hard to quit.

• Talk to them about your family rules.

• Notice when your children are doing something right and congratulate them. It builds their confidence.

• Stay connected. Keep listening. Keep talking.

1 The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS), pg. 27, 2013
“Teens are much less likely to use substances if they have learned a lot about the risks of drug use from their parents.”

1
Get ready to talk.

Take this quiz and check the answers with your kids. It’s fun and the information will be helpful in talks with your children. You may be surprised what you can find out!

Adapted from “Keeping Youth Drug Free,” Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

1. How well do you know your children?

2. What are their favorite colors?

3. Who are their best friends?

4. What are the names of your kids’ teachers?

5. Who are their favorite teachers?

6. Who are some of your kids’ role models?

7. What do they admire about these people?

8. What are their favorite movies, TV shows, music or radio stations?

9. What are their favorite activities or hobbies?

10. What are their dreams for the future?
Be prepared to answer questions about your smoking, drinking, or medicine use.

WHAT CAN I SAY IF MY CHILDREN ASK ME IF I EVER USED DRUGS?
Your child looks up to you — you can decide and do not have to give information that you’re not comfortable sharing. Try to stay focused on them.

SOME WAYS TO ANSWER

“ We’re talking about you, and I want to help you to be safe.”

“ I’ve seen a lot of people get into trouble with alcohol and drugs, and I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

“ Everybody makes mistakes. I want to keep you from making a bad choice.”

WHAT CAN I SAY OR DO IF I DRINK OR SMOKE NOW?

“ When I started smoking, I didn’t understand how hard it would be to quit. Maybe you can help me quit.”

“ I’m an adult. It’s against the law to drink if you are under 21.”

STEP 3:
Be a good role model. Never talk about smoking, drinking, or drug use as something exciting or fun.
Know the facts before you start talking.

Your child may know more about drugs, tobacco, and alcohol than you do! Don’t worry. You don’t need to know everything.

HERE ARE A FEW FACTS TO GET YOU STARTED:

• Most middle school-aged kids don’t use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

• The younger children start to use alcohol or tobacco, the more likely it is that they’ll suffer from abuse or dependence.

• Changes in the brain can happen when kids use alcohol.\(^2\)

• Cigarettes are not the only tobacco product young people use. New, colorful, flavored, cheap little cigars have become as popular as cigarettes and are often easier for young people to get. E-cigarettes, also as known as vape pens and e-hookah, are nicotine delivery devices that have sweet flavors and colorful packaging.

• Young people may try prescription drugs from their parents’ or grandparents’ home without knowing this is illegal and dangerous.

• You may have lots of products in your home that could be used in unhealthy ways.

Find out more. Check out drug facts for parents of middle schoolers on page 22.

Start the conversation.

Your children are listening to you — even when it looks like they aren’t! What you say about choices they make can help them grow up healthier.

HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO GET YOUR KIDS TALKING TO YOU ABOUT WHAT’S GOING ON IN THEIR LIVES:

• Ask your child what’s going on — about friends and what’s new and fun.

• Get your children to talk about feelings, such as how they feel about school, their friends, or being a pre-teen or teen.

• Ask questions, so they know you’re listening.

• Listen to your children and show them that what they say and think matters.

• Respect their answers even if you don’t agree with them.

• Use what comes up on the radio or TV to start talking. For example:

  “In that show we just watched, how do you think that girl (or boy) could have avoided being around alcohol or drugs?”

  “I realize we haven’t talked about alcohol or drugs. I love you and want to be sure you’re healthy, so our family needs to set some rules.”

  “When I picked you up at school yesterday, I noticed some kids smoking. That’s pretty unusual. What do you think about that?”

  “I know most kids your age don’t drink. I just want you to understand how important it is not to drive in a car with anyone who has been drinking or using drugs. Promise me you’ll call me if you need a ride — anytime.”
Whenever I talk to my daughter, it seems like she tunes me out.

Talks can be short, but make it clear to your children what you expect from them. They need to know that you’ll be checking in with them from time to time. They are listening, even if they don’t let you know. Your kids will thank you, even if they don’t say so for years.
STEP 6:

Make family rules and keep them.

STEPS TO CREATING RULES THAT WORK:

• Make clear rules. Rules can include when your children are expected home, what chores they have to do, etc.

• Write the rules down. Put them in a place where they can be seen.

• Consider rewards for following the rules, such as a family trip or free event.

• Give every rule a punishment if broken, such as no phone calls or computer time for one week.

• Stick to the rules.

• Go over the rules as your child gets older, and support their growth as your children become more responsible.

• Watch your children’s activities. When you know what your kids are doing, they are less likely to try substances.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS AND EXAMPLES OF IMPORTANT RULES TO SET:

• No riding in a car driven by a person who has been drinking alcohol or using drugs.

• No drinking alcohol until you are 21.

• No staying at parties where other teens are drinking or using drugs.

• No using illegal drugs, ever.

• No using tobacco, ever. No cigarettes, no cigars, no smokeless tobacco, and no e-cigarettes, e-hookah, or vape pens.

• Stay away from places where others are smoking. Secondhand smoke is dangerous and can make kids sick.

“My daughter always balked when I set rules, but she says now it helps her make good choices about not using alcohol or drugs.”
HERE ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT YOUR RULES:

• Talk with other parents about the rules you have set for your kids.

• Know where your children are and have a set time when your kids have to be home.

• Make a plan in case your child gets into a situation where alcohol or other drugs are being used.


FITTING IN AND PRESSURE FROM FRIENDS

Your coaching can help prepare your kids. You can help them build confidence by talking to them about how to say no to tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. You can suggest your kids say:

“ No thanks. Let’s go to my house and hang out. ”

“ Not now, I gotta go. ”

“ No! I’ll get grounded. ”

Help them to come up with their own ways to say no and try them out with you. They can take the lead.

Encourage them to spend time with friends who choose to stay away from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Congratulations! You are on your way to helping your kids stay alcohol-, tobacco-, and drug-free.

Kids are less likely to use substances if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.
STEP 7:

Keep your home safer from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

HELPFUL HINTS:

• Think about keeping prescription drugs and alcohol locked up.
• If you use tobacco, try to quit.
• Keep track of your prescription and over-the-counter drugs.
• Mix old medicines with kitty litter or coffee grounds and throw away in a sealed container.*
• Watch such things as your cleaning products, paint cans, hair spray, and nail polish remover to make sure they are not disappearing. Watch your kids if they use these products.**

If you smoke, your kids are more likely to smoke. For help quitting, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669; TTY 1-800-833-1477)

*Visit www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm for details
**For information on inhalant abuse, prevention, and safer household products, go to www.inhalantabusetraining.org.
Build your support system.

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY WHO CAN SUPPORT YOU AS YOU TALK WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND DRUGS:

• Family doctors, nurses, and faith leaders may have experience in talking to middle schoolers and parents about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

• School counselors and coaches can be helpful in supporting your rules.

• Community health centers and anti-drug coalitions have information to share.

OTHER WAYS TO KEEP YOUR KIDS SAFER:

• Make sure your children’s school has a strong anti-drug program.

• Join a community underage drinking prevention coalition to help support a healthy community.

• Take a closer look at the types of tobacco and nicotine products that are being sold in stores that your children visit. Know what they are and talk with other parents about it.

THE LAWS

Knowing some of the laws about using alcohol, tobacco, and drugs could help your middle schooler stay away from them. Some of these laws include:

• Giving or selling tobacco to anyone under 18 is illegal.

• It’s illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to have alcohol.

• Using or even holding someone else’s prescription drug is breaking the law.

• Using household products as inhalants is against state law.
Watch for warning signs.*

TAKE THIS QUIZ!
If you have seen some of these changes in your kids, they might be using alcohol or other drugs.

1. Have you noticed a change in mood?

2. Is your child sleeping or eating more or less than usual?

3. Does your middle schooler show less interest in school, friends, or activities?

4. Is the quality of schoolwork getting worse or is he or she skipping school?

5. Does your middle schooler have new friends you haven’t met?

6. Is money missing or have objects disappeared from the house?

7. Is your child talking about parties where drugs and alcohol are being used?

8. Is your middle schooler breaking rules or acting angry?*

Some of these behaviors are normal for pre-teens. But if you think your child may be using alcohol or other drugs, have a calm and supportive talk with him or her and get help. Getting help early is the key to protecting your child’s health.
I missed the warning signs. My daughter is only 12.”

*Request a free copy of “Alcohol and Other Drugs: Is Your Teen Using?” at 1-800-952-6637 (TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-720-3480). You can also order or download it at www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse. (See Alcohol and Other Drugs section)

You can find other signs of alcohol use at http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/AlcoholOverdoseFactsheet/Overdosefact.htm

See other resources on page 20.
Get help if you need it: Resources.

HELPLINES AND HOTLINES IN MASSACHUSETTS

Youth Central Intake and Care Coordination (YCICC): The coordinators can help you decide what will be the best choices for your family. This state-funded service also helps Massachusetts youth and families access treatment programs specifically for teens. YCICC is a project of the Institute for Health and Recovery. 1-617-661-3991 or 1-866-705-2807; TTY: 1-617-661-9051; 9am–5pm; Monday-Friday except holidays.

Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline: Information and treatment referrals are provided for youth, adults, and families. 1-800-327-5050; TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-720-3480 (toll-free; multi-lingual); www.helpline-online.com.

Emergency Services Programs (ESP): Services for substance abuse and/or mental health in emergencies are available for the uninsured, MassHealth, and many insured Massachusetts residents of all ages. This service can address issues that involve both substance abuse and mental health. 1-877-382-1609; TTY: 1-800-249-9949 (toll-free, 24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year); www.masspartnership.com/member/ESP.aspx

Mass 211: Information and referrals for youth (including recreational programs) and family services are offered. 2-1-1 or 1-877-211-6277 (toll-free; multi-lingual); TTY: 1-508-370-4890; www.mass211help.org

Massachusetts Smokers’ Helpline: A free and confidential way to support you as you try to quit smoking by offering telephone sessions with a trained tobacco treatment specialist. 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669); Spanish 1-800-8-DÉJALO (1-800-833-5256); TTY: 1-888-229-2182.


Massachusetts and Rhode Island Poison Control Center: Information and hotline about inhalants and other poisons. 1-800-222-1222 (toll-free, 24 hours); TTY: 1-888-244-5313; www.maripoisoncenter.com.
ADDITIONAL MASSACHUSETTS RESOURCES

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services:
Information on alcohol, other drugs, and services. Parents can look here for tips and resources. www.mass.gov/dph/bsas or www.mass.gov/parentpower.

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Tobacco Cessation and Prevention Program:
Information on tobacco. www.mass.gov/dph/mtcp. Also, call the phone number on the back of your health insurance card to find out what medicines are covered to help you quit smoking. MassHealth covers all FDA-approved quit-smoking medicines.

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse:
This service offers free information on alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs as well as other health topics:

• “Choose to Keep Your Freedom” (English and Spanish)

• “Preventing Substance Abuse Starts at Home: Safeguarding Your Children” (English and Spanish)

• “Their Future Depends on You: Together We Can Prevent Prescription Drug Abuse” (English and Spanish)

• “The Strengthening Families Program” home use DVD, including actions that parents can take based on the science of preventing alcohol and other drug abuse.

For copies of these brochures and DVD or more copies of this booklet, contact 1-800-952-6637 (toll-free, multilingual); TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-720-3480; www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse. (See Alcohol and Other Drugs section)

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT RESOURCE FOR YOUTH

The Cool Spot:
Share with your pre-teen this interactive website for young teens. www.thecoolspot.gov.
FACTS FOR PARENTS ABOUT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND OTHER DRUGS.
The substances: As a parent, you may want to know some of the basics as you talk to your child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT IT IS</th>
<th>RISKS</th>
<th>WHAT TO LOOK FOR</th>
<th>LEGAL STATUS*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alcohol</strong></td>
<td>• Booze</td>
<td>• Damage to the brain</td>
<td>• Alcohol missing from bottles at home</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Juice</td>
<td>• Bad decisions, increased likelihood of violent behavior and accidents</td>
<td>• Smell of alcohol on breath</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Beer</td>
<td>• Possibility of depression and suicide</td>
<td>• Speech, attention, memory, coordination impairments</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Wine</td>
<td>• Alcohol addiction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Cooler</td>
<td>• Injury or death from car crashes, alcohol poisoning, or overdose</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Shots</td>
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<td><strong>Tobacco</strong></td>
<td>• Smokes, butts, spit, chew, dip</td>
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<td>• It can be smoked in cigarettes, cigars, mini-cigars, or chewed (smokeless tobacco)</td>
<td>• Addiction — middle school-age brains develop an addiction to nicotine more easily and parts of the brain may never fully develop. Within days of starting to smoke, pre-teens show signs of addiction.</td>
<td>• Cigarettes, matches, lighters</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Dissolvable tobacco can be tablets, breath strips, hand gel, etc.</td>
<td>• Bad breath, yellow teeth, tooth decay, smell on clothing, etc.</td>
<td>• Smell of smoke in clothing, hair</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• E-cigarettes, vape pens, and e-hookah are nicotine delivery devices; they usually have sweet flavors.</td>
<td>• Less energy, less physical strength</td>
<td>• Breath mint-like tins</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lung disease, oral cancer, loss of teeth, heart disease, cancer, stroke, asthma</td>
<td>(In some users) Sweatiness, shakiness, paleness, nausea, and vomiting</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>• Pot, weed, reefer, joint, blunt, dope, grass, herb</td>
<td>• Affects lifetime achievement</td>
<td>Updates can be found at <a href="http://www.mass.gov/parentpower">www.mass.gov/parentpower</a>. Click on marijuana use.</td>
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<td>• It’s dried leaves and flowers of the Cannabis plant</td>
<td>• Motor vehicle accidents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Can be smoked using rolling papers or pipes</td>
<td>• Addiction</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Symptoms of chronic bronchitis</td>
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<td>Prescription (Rx) and Over-The-Counter Drugs</td>
<td>• Some are called Kpins (Klonopin, used for anxiety), Oxy or OC (OxyContin, used for pain), Vikes (Vicodin, used for pain), Skittles or Kibbles (Ritalin, used for ADHD), cold medicines, and more.</td>
<td>• More dangerous when mixed with alcohol</td>
<td>Illegal to purchase or use Rx drugs without a valid prescription from the doctor</td>
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<td>• Found in homes, stores, or pharmacies</td>
<td>• Loss of appetite</td>
<td>Illegal to give away your own or others’ prescription drugs; illegal to sell your own or others’ prescription drugs</td>
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<td>• Can be tablets, capsules, or syrups</td>
<td>• Fevers, convulsion, or headaches</td>
<td>Illegal to use over-the-counter drugs in the production of illicit drugs</td>
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<td>• Irregular heartbeat and breathing</td>
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<td>• Addiction</td>
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<td>• Overdose, death</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Missing medicine</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Twitching, sleepiness, or sleeplessness</td>
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<td>• Change in mood</td>
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<td>• Less interest in school, activities, or friends, or new friends you haven’t met yet</td>
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<td>• Eating or sleeping more or less than usual</td>
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*This list is not exhaustive and may be subject to change. This should not be taken as legal advice.

If your child is unresponsive or can’t wake up, call 911 immediately.
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| **Inhalants** | • Glue, kick, bang, poppers, whippets, snappers, locker room, snort, laughing gas  
• Can include gases, fuels, products that contain solvents, or anything in an aerosol can  
• Can be sniffed or “huffed” through the mouth | • Brain, liver, and kidney damage  
• Loss of consciousness  
• Addiction  
• Death from heart failure, accidents, or suffocation | • Sneezing, coughing, nosebleeds  
• Mood swings, confusion  
• Sores on face or in mouth, rash around nose  
• Use of these products as inhalants is illegal |

*This list is not exhaustive and may be subject to change. This should not be taken as legal advice.*
LEARN MORE:

• Additional information on alcohol can be found at www.niaaa.nih.gov.

• Information on additional drugs can be found at www.drugabuse.gov.

• Information on other inhalants can be found at www.inhalantabusetraining.org.

Thank you for your help in keeping Massachusetts youth healthy.
To order this and other brochures on alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, please go to www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse