
"MUMMY? WHAT ARE THEY SNIFFING?"

Talking to children about drugs requires an age-specific approach. For younger children aged between seven and twelve, they are naturally more inquisitive and also more impressionable. They may take certain things at face value so it is important that parents play a supervisory role to explain why certain things are so harmful. It may also seem difficult to illustrate the concept of drugs to children in this age group because they have not acquired a solid understanding of what defines 'good' and 'bad'.



BE A GOOD EXAMPLE

Education starts at home. As a parent, you are the best role model for your child. For topics that may be hard to explain especially to young children, you can set positive examples that are obvious at home. For instance, after a long day's work, do not immediately reach for a beer the moment you come home from work as this sends the signal that it is normal to unwind by consuming alcohol. Refrain from smoking in front of your children as it gives them the wrong impression that it is permissible for them to pick up the habit since mom and dad are doing so. Also, do not take pills indiscriminately in front of your child. Your actions need to mirror your beliefs.

TEACHING THEM NOT TO ACCEPT ANYTHING FROM STRANGERS WITHOUT PERMISSION

In this lower age group, your child must be taught not to accept food or other items from strangers without your explicit permission. Explain to him that some of these strangers could be bad people and the items they are offering could be harmful like drugs. Emphasize that drug abuse of any kind could lead to serious health problems and even death. Some children associate death with sadness and thus learn to make the right decisions.

IT IS NEVER TOO EARLY TO START TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THE DANGERS OF DRUG ABUSE. USE AGE-SPECIFIC TERMS AND KEEP THINGS SIMPLE FOR EASY UNDERSTANDING.

Results of the Youth Perception Survey 2013 (commissioned by the National Council Against Drug Abuse) found that **parents play an important role in deterring drug abuse amongst youths**. Youths surveyed indicated that they would approach their family (in particular parents), counsellors and teachers if they had any questions on drugs. As parents are most likely the first source of information, it is crucial for them to be well-informed in matters relating to drug abuse and to play an active role in reinforcing anti-drug messages to their children.

ESTABLISH A CLEAR POSITION ON DRUGS

It is fine to say "We do not allow any drugs or alcohol in this family" upfront. Make it known to your child that the only time he is allowed to take medicine is when he is ill and only with a doctor's prescription. Tell your child that you made this rule because you love him and that drug abuse can severely harm the body.

PROVIDE AGE-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

When your little one is brushing his teeth, explain how certain practices keep the body healthy like oral hygiene but drug abuse will only bring about serious damages. Remind the child that some household products such as glues and nail polish also have the same bad effects when inhaled.

Ultimately, you have to talk to your child often about making the right choices in life and keeping his aspirations in sight. He will need to learn that even the first try of drugs (no matter how small the quantity) is dangerous and might result in immediate fatal consequences.