

# Helping teens stay drug-free

Most parents don't want to think about their teen using drugs. They assume their teen is doing OK. They may also think it would be obvious if their teen was into drugs or alcohol.

Unfortunately, even teens with great parents sometimes take risks and make dangerous choices.



## WHY DO TEENS TAKE RISKS?

A teen's brain is very sensitive to emotions and doing things that feel good. Plus, their brains aren't fully developed yet.

This means they are not ready to make rational decisions all the time. They may also struggle with mental health issues like depression or anxiety. It can be all too easy to slip into using drugs or alcohol.



## WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

A good relationship with your teen is important. This can help them feel they can talk to you about challenges they are facing. This also means they might come to you if they have a problem with drugs or alcohol. Here are some tips to help you stay connected:



- **Be a great listener.** Talk with your teen about their daily life. Give them a chance to express their opinion. Don't interrupt. If they tell you something upsetting, try to remain calm. Ask them how you can help.

- **Help them find activities.**

Teens do well if they have an outlet for fun and stress relief. This may be music, sports, religious activities or volunteering.

- **Know your teen's friends.**

Encourage your teen and their friends to hang out at your house.

- **Don't solve their problems for them.**

Parents want to help their teen when they need it. But it's often more effective to teach them skills to help them solve their own problems. If they have a fight with a friend, talk with them about ways they could work it out themselves. Offer your support but try not to step in.



- **Talk about tough stuff.**

Help your teen figure out what to do if they are being pressured into something. Show them that they can turn to you. Do they feel comfortable calling you if they need a ride home from a party? Can they talk to you about peer pressure and drinking?

Source: National Institutes of Health