



Phoenix House
Rising Above Addiction

Talking to Your Kids - After They've Experimented

Discussions with your kids about substance use and abuse will differ based on whether you are trying to prevent them from starting to use alcohol or other drugs, stop them from experimenting, or seeking help once they've developed a problem. Here are some tips to help you discuss alcohol or other drug use if your kids have already experimented.

What To Say

Most parents have lamented that “Babies don’t come with instruction manuals.” As parents, we often wish there were clear guidelines to help us through tough situations. Below are some recommendations on how to talk with your teen if he/she has started to experiment with alcohol or other drugs.

I Caught My Child Using

- Don’t try to talk with your teens while they are intoxicated. Wait until they are sober!
- Avoid assumptions. Stick to observed signs and logical conclusions: “When you came home last night, you smelled like beer, you were wobbling around, and you were slurring your words — it was clear that you had been drinking alcohol.”
- Refer back to the family rules and consequences you have previously discussed.
- If you have not previously developed a clear family policy on alcohol and other drugs:
 - a. Acknowledge that you have never really talked about this issue before.
 - b. Set rules and consequences for experimenting with alcohol and other drugs.
 - c. Ensure that your kid is committed to following your rules.
 - d. Impose a consequence for this first infraction (although you may not have previously spelled out the rules, most teens know that they are not supposed to experiment with alcohol and other drugs).

Questions For Your Teen:

- How often do you drink alcohol/get high?
- Who do you drink or use drugs with?
- Under what circumstances?
- When your friends are using, do you feel obligated to use, too?
- If your friends ask you to participate, do you feel comfortable saying no?
- Can you give me an example of what you will do/say when offered alcohol or other drugs?

What About Your Own Use?

If you never got drunk or high in your younger days, tell your teen the truth, and explain your reasons. If, however, you did use in the past, you've got several choices. There is no one right way to respond. It should depend on your relationship with your teen, your own sense of how your teen will understand your story, and your sense of boundaries.

The options include:

- Don't admit to anything. Some people prefer to lie, while others are evasive and turn the question back towards the teen ("Why do you want to know?" or "Isn't the past less important than the present?")

- Minimize your use. For example, you might say you tried alcohol or other drugs once or twice, but didn't like it.

- Take responsibility for your past use. If you choose this route — and many today do — you should:
 - a. Not glorify past use (teens can interpret this as implicit permission to use).
 - b. Be clear about any problems it caused you or friends.
 - c. If referring to marijuana in particular, mention that marijuana today is much stronger than it was when you were younger, so the risks are not the same.
 - d. If you have family members who had alcohol or other drug problems, note that addiction is a disease that has a high degree of heritability, similar to diabetes or heart disease. If heredity is a factor, your child needs to be particularly cautious.

For more information call 1800 DRUG HELP.

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