



## Talking About Alcohol and Other Drugs with Young People

Raising children is full of all kinds of conversations, from the easy “why can’t we eat cake for breakfast?” to the not-so-easy “how are babies made?”.

Talking about alcohol and other drugs can be one of those not-so-easy conversations. This factsheet has some tips to make it easier for everyone.

### Talking about alcohol and other drugs with young people isn’t one big talk

Having many small conversations over the years helps reinforce messages and keep the lines of communication open.

Alcohol and other drug discussions can be quick and topical (like a comment about something on the news) or they can be more in-depth (like talking to a young person about what they see happening around them), whatever suits you and your young person.

Add the topic into your everyday normal conversation as the opportunities arise.

### The Law

In Australia, alcohol and other drug laws differ between states and territories. Generally, alcohol is legal to buy and consume for people over the age of 18. Laws for other types of drugs (such as cannabis, party pills, etc.) vary by state and territory as well, but generally, they are illegal to buy, sell and possess – at all ages.

In some states, people under 18 years may drink under adult supervision on private property with a parent or guardian’s permission.

Australia also has strict laws regarding drinking and driving. Learners and P Platers cannot have any alcohol in their blood at all when driving: they must have a **Blood Alcohol Content** (BAC) of 0.00. Fully licensed drivers cannot drive if they have a BAC of over 0.05.

### Drug Education for Young Children

For young children, drug education is about setting the foundations for resilience, self-esteem, and making choices. This kind of preventative education can begin as early as preschool.

**Medicines and safety.** Young children can begin learning about drugs in the form of medicines. Talk about:

- When they can take medicine (with a parent's help, when the doctor says)
- Where medicines are stored (high and out of reach)
- What to do if they find medicine (don't take it, tell an adult)
- What to do if they feel unwell (talk to an adult, have a rest, drink some water)
- What a poison label looks like and what it means

**Relationships.** Learning good social behaviours and developing strong relationships are protective factors for young children.

Practise taking turns, waiting patiently, asking permission, learning about differences and celebrating what makes your child special and unique. Talk about healthy choices.

**Choices.** Give your young child practice with decision making by giving age-appropriate, simple choices and talk about each one, e.g. why they made certain choices, the consequences of their choices, and the risks that might impact their choice.

## Drug Education for Older Children

For older children from about 8 years of age, drug education is about continuing to build the life skills they will need as adults, and giving them the opportunity to think about and practise keeping themselves safe around alcohol and other drugs.

You can begin introducing basic facts about alcohol and other drugs.

**Talk about safety plans.** Have young people describe and practise plans that can be used if they find themselves in a situation involving alcohol and other drugs that make them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Practise safe choice strategies they can use as they get older.

**Talk about the basic facts.** Continue talking about medicines, including the responsible use of over-the-counter medications, and start talking about other drugs: legal (e.g. alcohol, caffeine, tobacco, paracetamol) and illegal (e.g. cannabis, party pills). Talk about some facts; where these drugs come from and what they do in the body.

## Drug Education for Young Adults

For teenagers and young adults, drug education involves helping them make informed choices, providing reassurance, and continuing to build resilience and skills they will take into adulthood. Keep communication open, and start talking about values – your own, the values of your young person, and values that friends and other family members might have.

## Chatting Tips

### Find accurate information

It can be difficult to talk about alcohol and other drugs when you're not feeling confident about your own knowledge. You don't need to be an expert, but it helps to know where to find accurate information and to brush up on topics that you feel unsure about. Some great sources of information are at the end of this factsheet.

### Discuss the good and the bad

It's tempting to only talk about the bad side of alcohol and other drugs, but that's only one side of the story. People use drugs for many reasons. Young people will recognise this and want to hear both sides.

If a young person understands why someone might want to use drugs, they will be better equipped to understand their own desires and think critically about what they perceive as the benefits and risks.

### Set rules and safety plans together

When raising young people, it's important to set rules and boundaries. Talk to your young person about the rules you need to set and why you set them. If you talk with your young person about the reasons and allow them to help set fair consequences for broken rules, they are more likely to feel ownership over them and then be more likely to understand and follow them. Make sure you help them develop ways to get out of sticky situations and let them know you're there to help.

### Explain your beliefs

Young people instinctively look to their parents for guidance on how the world works and how to be a good adult. Take the time to explain your beliefs and how you feel, and share the evidence that you look to, and talk with your young person about what they think.

## Help and Info

If you'd like to speak to someone, local treatment services will be able to provide support for you and your family, and can answer any questions you may have about alcohol, withdrawal, and recovery.

- Medicines Line 1300 MEDICINE
- Get the effects by txt! 0439 TELL ME text the name of the drug you want info on
- [tuneinnotout.com](http://tuneinnotout.com) – youth website
- [Youth Law Australia](http://Youth Law Australia)
- Parents, Elders and trusted friends
- GPs and Pharmacists
- Your Local Alcohol and Other Drug Services or look under A in the phone book
- Fire, Ambulance, Police 000
- Lifeline Australia 13 11 14
- Kid's Helpline 1800 55 1800
- Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26
- Family Drug Support a 24/7 service
- [fds.org.au](http://fds.org.au) or 1300 368 186
- [CODE](http://CODE) Community Online Drug Education