

TALKING ABOUT ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS



With young people, at every age and stage.

Practical tips to make one of the trickier conversations a little easier.

Raising children is full of all kinds of conversations — from the easy to the not-so-easy. This one doesn't have to be a single big talk.

START HERE

MANY SMALL CHATS, NOT ONE BIG TALK

Having lots of small conversations over the years helps reinforce your message and keeps the lines of communication open. They can be quick and topical — a comment about something on the news — or more in-depth. Whatever suits you and your young person. Add the topic into everyday conversation as the opportunities come up.

CHECK IN

WHAT TO TALK ABOUT, AT EACH AGE

Drug education isn't a single conversation — it builds over time, growing with your child.

YOUNG CHILDREN

Setting the foundations

For young children, drug education is about building resilience, self-esteem, and decision-making. This kind of preventative education can start as early as preschool.

Medicines and safety. Young children can start 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, rest, drink water)
- What a poison label looks like, and what it means

Relationships. Good social behaviours and strong relationships are protective factors. Practise taking turns, waiting patiently, asking permission, and celebrating what makes your child special and unique.

Choices. Give your child practice with decision-making through age-appropriate, simple choices — and talk about why they chose what they did, and what the consequences might be.

OLDER CHILDREN (FROM ABOUT 8)

Building life skills

Continue building the life skills they'll need as adults, and give them the chance to think about — and practise — keeping themselves safe around alcohol and other drugs. You can start introducing basic facts.

Safety plans. Help young people describe and practise plans they can use if they find themselves in a situation involving alcohol or other drugs that feels unsafe or uncomfortable. Practise safe-choice strategies they can build on as they get older.

Basic facts. Keep talking about medicines, including responsible use of over-the-counter medications, and start talking about other drugs — legal (alcohol, caffeine, tobacco, paracetamol) and illegal (cannabis, party pills). Talk about where these drugs come from and what they do in the body.

TEENAGERS & YOUNG ADULTS

Informed choices

Drug education now is about helping them make informed choices, providing reassurance, and continuing to build the resilience and skills they'll carry into adulthood. Keep communication open, and start talking about values — yours, theirs, and those of friends and other family members.

CHATTING TIPS

A few ways to make these conversations easier for everyone.

FIND ACCURATE INFO

You don't need to be an expert, but it helps to know where to find good information — see the sources at the end of this sheet.

DISCUSS THE GOOD AND BAD

People use drugs for many reasons. If a young person understands why, they're better equipped to think critically about risks and benefits.

SET RULES TOGETHER

Talk about the rules you need to set, and why. Let them help set fair consequences — they're more likely to understand and follow rules they had a hand in.

EXPLAIN YOUR BELIEFS

Young people look to parents for guidance. Share how you feel and the evidence you look to, and ask what they think too.

You don't need all the answers.
You just need to keep the conversation open.

REACH OUT

HELP AND INFO

If you or your family would like to speak to someone, local treatment services can help, and can answer questions about alcohol, withdrawal, and recovery.

- Medicines Line — **1300 MEDICINE**
- Get the effects by txt — text the name of the drug to **0439 TELL ME**
- Your Local Alcohol and Other Drug Service
- GPs and pharmacists
- Parents, Elders, and trusted friends
- **tuneinnotout.com** — youth wellbeing website
- Youth Law Australia
- Fire, Ambulance, Police — **000**
- Lifeline Australia — **13 11 14**
- Kids Helpline — **1800 55 1800**
- Poisons Information Centre — **13 11 26**
- Family Drug Support (24/7) — **fds.org.au** or **1300 368 186**
- CODE — Community Online Drug Education

If a conversation raises a bigger concern

If something comes up that feels like more than you can handle together, support is available. **Visit alwf.org.au/support for options, or call Lifeline: 13 11 14.**



alwf.org.au