

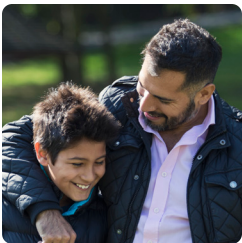
@WORK™

Early Detection Parent Guide

1. How To Start The Conversation/Keep The Conversation Going

Talking to your older teens/young adults about substance abuse must be ongoing. The complexity of mental health, stress, peer pressure, social norms, physical, emotional and cognitive development all come together resulting in a conversation on the same topic will take multiple forms throughout their teen years.

Getting comfortable with discussing overwhelming or difficult things can take practice. Here are some conversation starters and tips to keep in mind when talking to your older teen/young adult.



- “I know the school had a drug prevention program the other day, do you think it was effective with the kids at your school? Why or why not?”
- “Telling kids not to use drugs has never been a successful strategy, what do you think kids need to know to be able to make a healthy decision?”
- “How do your friends feel about things like vaping or marijuana?”
- “Do you think alcohol is a drug?”

Whether you’re having the conversation for the first time or the hundredth time, remember it doesn’t have to be your last. Circle back at every opportunity to explore what your older teen/young adult thinks about substance use on TV, Social Media, Music, at family gatherings, everywhere! Each time focus on the following:

- Stay relaxed – remember, you’re their safe place to have these conversations.
- Listen for how they are thinking as this is what builds trust in their judgement and ability to make a healthy decision.





- Be honest – tell them your experiences but stay focused on HOW & WHY you made the decisions you made, their impact and the consequences that did and did not but could have happened.
- It is ok to leave things open ended – give yourself permission to do some research and get back to them. Ending conversations with, “that is something I will have to think about and get back to you” tells them you’re thinking, learning and listening to them.

2. Communicating with Parent Peer Groups



One way to navigate this ever-changing hidden landscape is to foster your connection with your own parenting peers.

We know this can be daunting, but keep in mind that for an older teen/young adult, turning down substances most often involves saying no to a peer they value which is an equally daunting task. When we do daunting things, we model for our kids that they can do them too. Here are some places to start:

- “Do you think experimentation is a rite of passage?”
- “Have you talked to your older teen/young adult about drugs and alcohol?”
- “What consequences do you have in place for risky behaviors?”
- “If I have a concern for your child or mine, how would you like me to contact you?”
- “What are your fears for your child around substance use in teen years?”
- “How can we work together to keep our kids safe?”
- “If you ever have a concern about my child’s behavior, please let me know. These are some of the things that I would want to be notified about...”

3. Utilizing School & Community Partnerships

At LSIS, we honor that children are best served when families and communities work together to promote healthy development. When it comes to concerns about risky behaviors like substance use, approaching things as early as possible is the best way. As we like to say, “If you want to avoid traffic, leave early.”

Discuss your prevention strategy with the school as soon as possible. Start with getting to know your school guidance counselor, assistant principal, or even your older teen’s/ young adult’s favorite school personnel. Students develop relationships all throughout their school.



People from the crossing guard, school resource officer, front office staff, janitor and cafeteria workers all see your child on a daily basis and many times get to know them in many ways. Ask your older teen/young adult who they feel SEES them at school. Consider having a conversation with the school and even with that person.



Share what you feel are your child’s strengths as well as what your concerns are. Let them know whether you worry that they are easily influenced by their peers or even if you think they may be a leader among their friends and you want to ensure that they be a positive one. Be sure to ask the school to inform you if they see any of the following:

- Physical changes
- Changes in their mood or affect in school
- Changes in friend group
- Changes in attitudes towards risky behaviors

Things to keep in mind when partnering with your school.

This is a time when kids are exploring their own identity and sometimes older teens/ young adults present a different persona at school than what they present at home. Your mild-mannered teen may be a bit of a social powerhouse at school, influencing others in all kinds of ways. Your strong and confident teen may show up reserved among their peers at school and get caught up in behaviors you didn’t see coming.

Remember that this dichotomy is merely a reflection of normal teen development and not a lack of effort or understanding on the part of any caring adult. Regularly communicating about what you see at home and hearing what they see at school is the best way to monitor any changes in your child and promote early detection of risky behavior.

4. Are You A Trusted Adult?

This is a time where the “us” vs “them” mentality is strong regarding relationships with adults. Breaking this barrier will happen naturally as you continue these conversations and get to know them for who they are becoming. Parents are often focused on instructing, guiding and teaching, but it is important to also set aside time to learn about your older teen/young adult as they are changing.



Learn about their new friends, their goals, their fears and opinions. Notice what you see them making a priority in their life and talk to them about how these things came to be priorities. As a teen begins to trust that you appreciate them as a full person and not just as your child, they are more likely to listen to you.

If you are a trusted adult for a teen, be they your own or someone else’s, remember that once a teen gives you the gift of their trust, this is not something to take lightly. Yet, there is no denying that once a teen expresses any area of concern, certain steps must be taken.

The safest way to maintain their trust is NOT to keep any of their secrets, but to move quickly into a conversation about what confidences you can keep and which you cannot. Discuss with them how this information must and can be shared. Invite them to be a part of the conversation when information is shared.

5. How To Explain to an Older Teen/Young Adult What Being a *Trusted Adult Means.*

Older teens/young adults tend to cringe when we ask them if they have a trusted adult. It seems that the term is considered childish. At LSIS we often encourage students to think of a trusted adult as an ally.



An adult who supports them, often giving them space to make their own decisions while also being there to help them through the consequences when they don’t make the best decisions.

The “us” vs. “them” barrier that many of us experience is fueled by the fact that today’s older teen/young adult often doesn’t feel they have the space or permission from adults to make their own decisions. Every adult has an opportunity to point out to an older teen/young adult that they do make their own decisions and yet some of those decisions can be attached to significant life altering consequences that end up being difficult to navigate.

A trusted adult or “ally” is the person who helps them navigate those consequences. This includes helping them advocate with their authority figures. I often remind people that if an older teen/young adult is asking for help, they usually already know they’ve made a mistake and the lecture becomes unnecessary and unproductive.

Helping your older teen/young adult understand those parameters sets the boundaries early, models respect and prepares the way for the rapport that could be the basis for resisting substance abuse and supporting early detection.



6. Early Detection of Signs of Vaping

Vaping continues to increase in popularity and more and more schools are reporting rises in disciplinary actions related to vaping infractions.

Know that the first sign of any use is found in an older teen's/young adult's attitude. Ask your older teen/young adult how they feel about nicotine use? Do they have an opinion? Is it clearly positive, negative or are they ambivalent? Do they see the differences and similarities between vaping and cigarette use?

Ambivalent older teens/young adults are required to make a decision each time the opportunity to use presents itself. Unless they are firm on their decision from the start, they are likely to waver and are at greater risk of using.

There are some signs to watch out for: sweet scents in the air, unfamiliar pens, USB drives, smoker's cough, nosebleeds, conversations often referring to "stealth mode," "dab," and "ghost" as well as frequent trips to the bathroom.

If you've learned that your older teen/young adult has started using a vape, remember that nicotine addiction can take hold quickly encouraging them to try different flavors or brands. If you've caught your older teen/young adult vaping on multiple occasions, issuing consequences for the behavior may not be enough to create a change.

Consider meeting with a primary care doctor to discuss nicotine replacement options. Remember that nicotine withdrawal symptoms can be severely uncomfortable:



- Nausea
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Headaches
- Severe cravings

All these things happening when faced with classroom schoolwork amidst a peer group that is likely also vaping and also facing the temptation at each break between classes is daunting for an older teen/young adult fighting a nicotine addiction. Explore the resources available at your physician's office, online and at your school.

<https://teen.smokefree.gov/>

Can be a great resource for older teens/young adults and parents.

7. How To Help an Older Teen/Young Adult Have the Skills To Resist Substance Abuse



Helping older teens/young adults resist substance abuse is a complicated web.

Goal setting, proper coping skills and peer refusal skills are the trifecta.

Focus on ensuring that your older teens/young adults have goals and a strong future orientation. Never forget that these goals can range from “go to college and be a computer engineer” to “get out of this town.” Never discount any goal of any kind.

They are each an opportunity to build on. Helping them develop an image for their next steps allows you an opportunity to talk about the types of stressors they are currently and, are likely to face in the future.

Discussing coping skills encourages older teens/young adults to speak about their emotional stressors and reach out for help accordingly.

The third part of the trifecta is peer refusal skills. Being able to set boundaries with friends can be the hardest thing for kids at any age. Encouraging your older teen/young adult to assess their relationships is important.

This starts with asking them to consider how many of their actions are self-driven versus peer-driven. When we ask older teens/young adults to reflect on this, we plant the seed that there is a distinction. They will need ongoing help navigating that distinction.

8. How To Address Medical Marijuana versus Recreational Use



Medical versus recreational marijuana use is an ongoing debate that we all face at any age. Let me start with clarifying that there is NO DISTINCTION between “medical” and “recreational” marijuana outside of the purpose of use.

Students often speak to us about “medical grade” marijuana. What most people don’t realize is that there is no such thing. Medical marijuana refers only to marijuana being used to treat a medical condition. The medical research remains mixed about its benefits.

In fact, the FDA has not approved cannabis as a treatment for any medical condition. Only one cannabis derived drug and FOUR synthetic cannabis drugs have been approved to treat epilepsy and the side effects of cancer and aids related weight loss.

Students would like to engage in the debate and many times, I will draw a parallel with opioids and the poppy plant. Opioids are used for medicinal purposes as well as recreational. We do know that the medical marijuana industry has increased access to edible marijuana.

Edible marijuana poses extraordinary risk for over-consumption and increased risk of drug-induced psychosis. Students are often unaware of this fact and always benefit from informative conversations.

We all know that the popular cultural attitudes towards marijuana use are evolving and becoming increasingly more accepting.

Students need to navigate these changing attitudes as well as the rest of us. Asking students their thoughts is a great way to build rapport and provides an opportunity to educate them on the science of addiction and the role recreational use of any substance can play in derailing us from goals.



9. Early Detection: Signs of Opioids

Early detection of opioid abuse starts with understanding an older teen's/young adult's potential access to opioids.

- Know who's been injured on the ball field and may have surgery coming up.
- Keep an eye out for his/her friends.
- Be aware of what your older teen's/young adult's peer group has access to, including knowing if one of them has a parent who is having surgery.

Older teens who are regularly using opioids are often having trouble staying awake, an inability to keep up with athletics, weight loss, skin picking, frequently scratching at their skin, pinpoint pupils, constipation, lack of hygiene and frequent flu-like symptoms.

Since our goal is early detection, noticing things like flippant attitudes towards drug experimentation, signs of use of any substances, drop in grades, changes in peers or presenting as in a state of euphoria.

Right now, there are popular shows on television that glorify the use of substances among high schoolers. While these shows are rated for mature audiences, a number of teens are watching.

While the instinct may be to give a sign or message of disapproval, this is also an opportunity to specifically address your older teen's/young adult's attitude towards substance abuse. Early detection is about grabbing on to any and every opportunity to discuss and, ultimately, assess their mindset around substances.

