

Advice for Parents & Caregivers

How to Talk About Drugs



Before we start

If you're unsure how to talk about drugs, that's completely normal. Most parents weren't shown how to do this growing up.

This guide isn't about saying the perfect thing. It's about staying connected, even when topics feel uncomfortable.

Who this guide is for

This is for parents and carers who want realistic, practical ways to talk about drugs with children and young people, without fear, lectures, or judgement.

Why this matters

Young people often hear about drugs from peers or online before adults raise the subject. When conversations don't happen at home, peers can become the main source of advice.

What this guide is

This guide focuses on communication rather than substances. It's about how to keep conversations open, honest, and ongoing as children grow.

What good conversations do

Good conversations reduce secrecy, encourage questions, and make it easier for young people to ask for help. They focus on safety, not punishment.

What makes conversations harder

Lectures, threats, panic, or one-off talks can shut communication down. If young people fear consequences, they may avoid honesty.

What we see in real life

In real life, conversations about drugs rarely start in calm, planned moments. They often happen after something has already raised concern, when emotions are high and trust feels fragile.

What parents often experience: Worry, fear of saying the wrong thing, or concern about making things worse can lead to avoiding the conversation altogether.

What young people often experience: Fear of getting into trouble, being judged, or having freedoms taken away. This can make them downplay, hide, or deny what's really going on.

Why conversations break down: When adults move straight into warnings or consequences, young people often hear danger rather than care. This can close the door to future honesty.

What helps in practice: Short, calm conversations over time build far more trust than one serious talk. Listening first, staying curious, and focusing on safety helps young people feel able to come back if something goes wrong.

Why early conversations matter: When communication stays open, young people are more likely to ask for help, check information, and pause before taking risks.

Why harm happens

When young people feel unable to talk to trusted adults, they rely more heavily on peers for guidance, even when that guidance is inaccurate or risky.

How to talk to your child about drugs

Keep conversations age-appropriate, honest, and two-way. Ask what they already know before sharing information. Stay calm, even when you're worried.

Peer pressure and the need to fit in

Young people often make choices based on belonging rather than risk awareness. Talking openly about peer pressure helps them pause and question advice from friends.

What your child can say if they're offered drugs

Ages 10–12

- No thanks.
- I'm not allowed.
- I'm telling an adult.

Ages 13–15

- Nah, not my thing.
- I'm good, thanks.
- I'm sticking with my friends.

Ages 16–18

- I'm good, cheers.
- Not tonight.
- I've said no.

When to be concerned

If communication has broken down completely, if behaviour changes suddenly, or if safety feels at risk, it's time to seek advice. Trust patterns rather than single moments.

A final note

You don't need one perfect conversation. You need many calm ones over time. Staying present and approachable reduces harm more than getting everything right.

Educational use only. Not medical advice. If someone is unwell or at risk, seek professional medical help or call 999 in an emergency.