

TIPS FOR TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCES

Always express your love for your child and your concern about their well-being.



Talk to your child from a young age about their emotional experiences and peer influence. Remind your child that you are always there to talk and answer questions. Be prepared; as a caregiver, sometimes the information may be hard to hear.



Practice different scenarios with your child about how to manage difficult situations where they might feel uncomfortable. Examples could include situations with peers or being around substances, such as vapes and alcohol. Help them create realistic scenarios.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
**MOBILE
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SUPPORT**
1-855-634-HOPE
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Let your child know you understand they will or may have already been faced with difficult situations. Reinforce your concern and disapproval of their engagement in risky behaviors.



Explain to your child their well-being and safety is your priority. Demonstrating skills such as responsible decision making and positive coping strategies will help your child navigate through life.



Clearly state your feelings regarding their overall well-being.



Short, frequent discussions with your child can have a real impact on your child's choices.

Resources

- <https://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources/small-conversations>
- <https://www.montcopa.org/2895/Student-Assistance-Program>

For questions or support, email:
SAP@montcopa.org

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION ABOUT SUBSTANCES

Age & Scenario

What to Say

2-4 years old

Your child is curious about medicine bottles they see in your home.

"You only take medicine when you're sick, and only if [list your trusted adults] give it to you. Sometimes medicine looks like candy, so always ask an adult before you touch it."

5-8 years old

Your child has expressed curiosity about the substances they see on a regular basis [medication, alcohol, vaping devices].

"Sometimes adults use [medication, alcohol, vaping devices]. It doesn't mean that is safe for you to use. We can always talk about questions you might have."

9-12 years old

Your child is just starting middle school and you know that it's more likely that they will now be exposed to substances at school or in social environments.

"I know we talked about this when you were younger, but you're at the age now when you might be seeing or hearing about other kids vaping, smoking, drinking or using drugs. Remember, our family does not allow those under 21 to use substances because it's bad for your health and your brain. I'm here for you and the best thing you can do is talk to me if you are confused or worried."

13-18 years old

You're with your child and you both notice a few kids vaping.

"It worries me to see kids using substances. What do you think about that? I know it can feel like most kids are using."

"I want you to enjoy school and being with your friends, but I also expect you not to drink or use other drugs. You can talk to me about anything, and I will always be here to support and help you."

Your child comes home smelling of alcohol or cigarette/marijuana smoke.

"I'm really upset that you're smoking/drinking. I love you and care about you and want to understand why you chose to do it. Your health and well-being are what's most important, and I'm asking you to be honest. Tell me more about what happened and why you were [insert concerning behavior]."