

When it comes to drugs, teens are a savvy bunch. Drugs and messages about living drug-free have been part of their lives for years. They can make distinctions not only among different drugs and their effects, but also among trial, occasional use and addiction. They've witnessed many of their peers using drugs — some without obvious or immediate consequences, others whose drug use gets out of control. By the teen years, kids have also had to make plenty of choices of their own about drug use: whether they should give in to peer pressure and experiment with drugs, or go against some of their peers and stay clean.

Here are 6 tips to help you help your teen continue to live a healthy, drug-free life:

1. **Don't speak generally about drug- and alcohol-use— your older teen needs to hear detailed and reality-driven messages.** Topics worth talking about with your teen: using a drug just once can have serious permanent consequences; can put you in risky and dangerous situations; anybody can become a chronic user or addict; combining drugs can have deadly consequences.
2. **Emphasize what drug use can do to your teen's future.** Discuss how drug use can ruin your teen's chance of getting into the college she's been dreaming about or landing the perfect job.
3. **Challenge your child to be a peer leader among his friends and to take personal responsibility for his actions and show others how to do the same.**
4. **Encourage your teen to volunteer somewhere that he can see the impact of drugs on your community.** Teenagers tend to be idealistic and enjoy hearing about ways they can help make the world a better place. Help your teen research volunteer opportunities at local homeless shelters, hospitals or victim services centers.
5. **Use news reports as discussion openers.** If you see a news story about an alcohol-related car accident, talk to your teen about all the victims that an accident leaves in its wake. If the story is about drugs in your community, talk about the ways your community has changed as drug use has grown.
6. **Compliment your teen for the all the things he does well and for the positive choices he makes.** Let him know that he is seen and appreciated. And let him know how you appreciate what a good role model he is for his younger siblings and other kids in the community. Teens still care what their parents think. Let him know how deeply disappointed you would be if he started using drugs.