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The Drugs Dilemma: Advice for Parents

Are you worried that your teen may be taking drugs or becoming interested in trying them? Whether you live in an urban or rural, wealthy or low-income neighbourhood, your children have access to illegal drugs. Being informed and engaged can serve as your best defense.

Teens can be exposed to drugs at school, on the streets, at homes and in clubs. We all know the risks associated with drug use can be very serious. The consequences include health problems, addiction, damage to relationships, criminal activity and legal problems.

How to deal with drugs

So, what can you do about drugs before your teen gets started—or before it gets serious?

- Listen to your kids and their friends.
- Keep the lines of communication open so you can talk about drugs.
- Be aware of the different types of drugs, their effects and any signs of drug use.
- Learn about the resources available to help your child and your family.
- Involve and engage your teenager in positive social activities—sports, neighbourhood clubs, youth centres and school groups.

Talking to teens about drugs

Many people think that talking to children about drugs will only increase their interest in trying them. Studies have proven that the opposite is true. It is important for parents to create open lines of communication with their kids at a young age and to talk to them about drugs, addiction and how these affect people's lives in negative ways. Children and teens need the tools to make good decisions early.

The National Anti-Drug Strategy offers these tips for talking to your teen about drugs:

- Listen to your teenager's concerns and take his or her questions seriously.

- Continue or develop the habit of talking regularly with your child on a variety of subjects. This will make it easier to discuss the issue of drug use when the time comes.
- Start early and get ahead of the questions. Start talking about drugs as soon as your child learns about their existence through friends, the media and the people around them.
- Your child should learn about the dangers of drugs from parents first. They benefit from getting a first perspective on drug use from parents, because it serves as the starting point for forming their own opinion in the future.
- Be clear on where you stand. Successful communication with your teenager requires clear ideas. Your teenager needs to understand that you have a definite position on drugs and that his or her behaviour will be measured against that position.

Resources to help you

Remember, better awareness will allow your children to make informed choices when temptation or peer pressure arises. The following excellent resources can help guide your discussions:

- National Anti-Drug Strategy: [Talking With Your Teen About Drugs](http://nationaldrugstrategy.gc.ca) (see nationaldrugstrategy.gc.ca)
- [Ottawa Student Drug Use and Health Report 2014](http://ottawa.ca) (see ottawa.ca)
- Partnership for Drug-Free Kids: [Parent Toolkit](http://drugfree.org) (see [drugfree.org/the-parent-toolkit/](http://drugfree.org))
- Recovery Connection: [Talking to Your Child About Drugs](http://recoveryconnection.org) (see recoveryconnection.org)

Do you want to learn more about keeping your family safe? Take a look at Crime Prevention Ottawa's Neighbourhood Toolkit at crimepreventionottawa.ca/toolkit. This valuable resource offers information to help you stay safe, build stronger neighbourhoods and prevent crime in your community.