

PARENTING

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TIPS

Keeping Children Drug Free

Parents are the most important role models in their children's lives. What you say and do about drugs matters a lot when it comes to the choices your children make. You can:

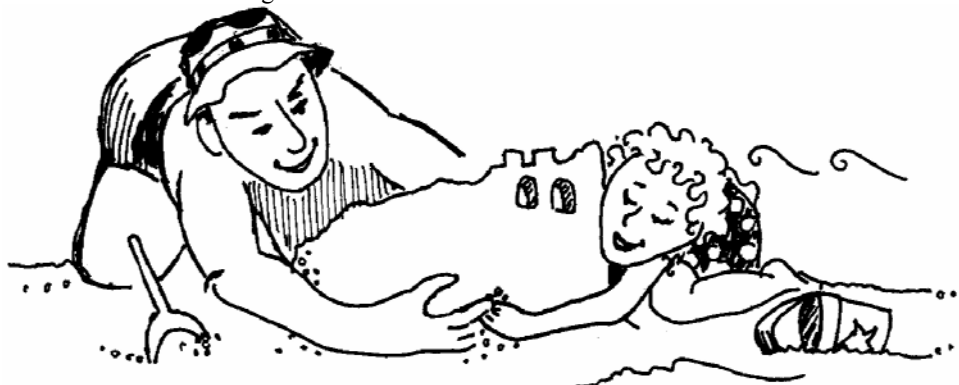
- ✧ set a positive example and get involved in your children's lives;
- ✧ get involved in their activities, know their friends and know where they're going and what they're doing;
- ✧ create clear, consistent expectations and enforce them;
- ✧ talk early and often about drugs;
- ✧ discuss the consequences of drug use; and
- ✧ show you care enormously about what choices your children make about drugs.

TIPS FOR YOUR PRESCHOOL CHILD

It may seem premature to talk about drugs with preschoolers, but the attitudes and habits that they form at this age have an important bearing on the decisions they will make when they are older. At this early age, they are eager to know and memorize rules, and they want your opinion on what's "bad" and what's "good." Although they are old enough to understand that smoking is bad for them, generally they are not ready to take in complex facts about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Nevertheless, this is a good time to practise the decision-making and problem-solving skills that they will need later on.

Here are some ways to help your preschool children make good decisions about what should and should not go into their bodies:

- ✧ Discuss why children need healthy food. Have your child name several favorite good foods and explain how these foods contribute to health and strength.



Time spent together reinforcing strong foundations
was time well spent

- ✧ Set aside regular times when you can give your son or daughter your full attention. Get on the floor and play with your child; learn about his or her likes and dislikes; let your child know that you love him; say that he or she is too wonderful and unique to take drugs. You'll build strong bonds of trust and affection that will make turning away from drugs easier in the years to come.
- ✧ Provide guidelines like playing fair, sharing toys and telling the truth so children know what kind of behavior you expect from them.
- ✧ Encourage your child to follow instructions and to ask questions if he does not understand the instructions.

- ✱ When your child becomes frustrated at play, use the opportunity to strengthen problem-solving skills. For example, if a tower of blocks keeps collapsing, work together to find possible solutions. Turning a bad situation into a success reinforces a child's self-confidence.
- ✱ Whenever possible, let your child choose what to wear. Even if the clothes don't quite match, you are reinforcing your child's ability to make decisions.
- ✱ Point out poisonous and harmful substances commonly found in homes, such as bleach, kitchen cleanser and furniture polish, and read the products' warning labels out loud. Explain to your children that not all "bad" drugs have warnings on them, so they should only eat or smell food or a prescribed medicine that you, a grandparent or a caregiver provides them.
- ✱ Explain that prescription medications are drugs that can help the person for whom they are meant but that can harm anyone else, especially children, who must stay away from them unless they are prescribed.

TIPS FOR YOUR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD

A child this age usually shows increasing interest in the world outside the family and home. Discuss how anything you put in your body that is not food, water or juice can be extremely harmful, and how drugs interfere with the way our bodies work and can make a person very sick or even cause them to die. (Most children of this age have had real-life experiences with the death of a relative or a friend's relative.) Explain the idea of addiction—that drug use can become a very bad habit that is hard to stop. Praise your children for taking good care of their bodies and avoiding things that might harm them.

By the time your children are in Year 3, they should understand that:

- ✱ foods, poisons, medicines and illegal drugs differ;
- ✱ medicines prescribed by a doctor and administered by a responsible adult may help during illness but can be harmful if misused, and therefore children need to stay away from any unknown substance; and
- ✱ adults may drink in moderation but children may not, even in small amounts because it's harmful to children's developing brains and bodies.

Before leaving primary school, your children should know:

- ✱ the *immediate* effects of alcohol, tobacco and drug use on different parts of the body, including coma and death;
- ✱ the *long-term* consequences of drug use, including addiction and loss of control of one's life;
- ✱ the reasons why drugs are especially dangerous for growing bodies; and
- ✱ the problems that alcohol and other illegal drugs cause not only to the user, but to the user's family and the world.

Questions primary school children frequently ask about drugs:

- ✱ Why would people want to put bad things in their bodies?
 - ☆ One answer might be that they might not realize how dangerous the bad things are; another is that they are not taking care of themselves. Sometimes people start using a drug just to see what it feels like, but it can turn into an addiction (like cigarettes) and it's very hard to stop using it.
- ✱ Why can't I taste that "grown-up" drink?
 - ☆ A small amount of alcohol has a much greater negative effect on a child's body than on an adult's; even a small amount can sicken a child.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs, Educational Partnerships and Family Involvement Unit, *Tips for Parents on Keeping Children Drug Free*, Washington, D.C., 2003.
www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/drugfree

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