

Set Rules for Your Children About Alcohol, Tobacco, and Illegal Drugs (Source: <http://www.family.samhsa.gov/set/drugs.aspx>)

Talking to your children about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs is an important step in keeping them safe and healthy. However, many parents neglect to take the next step: making sure that their children have clear rules about alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use. Unless you are clear about your position, children may be confused and thus tempted to use. Make sure you explain to them that you love them and are making these rules to keep them safe.



Here are some things to keep in mind when making and enforcing rules.

Be Specific

Tell your children the rule and what behavior you expect. For example, you could say, "You are not allowed to smoke cigarettes. Our family doesn't smoke because it's unhealthy," or, "Alcohol is for adults. The law says that you have to be 21 to drink. Our family follows the law." You might also tell your children that if they are at a party where alcohol or illegal drugs are being used, they can call you for a ride home.

Develop consequences for breaking any of the rules. If your children are old enough, they can help suggest appropriate and reasonable consequences. It may help to write up a list of rules and consequences for breaking each rule.

Be Consistent

Be sure your children understand that the rules are maintained at all times, and that the rules hold true even at other people's houses. Be sure to enforce the rule every time it is broken. It is important to set a good example; if you have a rule about drunk driving, make sure not to drive when you've been drinking or get in a car with someone who has. Children notice when their parents say one thing and do another. Another thing to think about, especially around the holidays, is that many of us use alcohol as a "special occasion celebration," perhaps allowing our children to have a sip of champagne or wine. This may also send mixed messages to your children, especially if you have a specific rule against drinking.

Be Reasonable

Don't change the rules in mid-stream or add new consequences without talking to your children. Avoid unrealistic threats. If you do find that your children have been experimenting with alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs, try to react calmly and carry out the consequence you have previously stated.

Recognize Good Behavior

Always let your children know how happy you are that they respect the rules of the household by praising them. Emphasize the things your children do right instead of focusing on what's wrong. When parents are quicker to praise than to criticize, children learn to feel good about themselves, and they develop the self-confidence to trust their own judgment.¹

Sources

¹ Know! A Community-Wide Partnership Empowering Kids to Be Substance-FreeT: Raising Kids in the Know! What YOU Can Do, last referenced 11/5/02.

Additional Resources

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information: Keeping Your Kids Drug Free: A How-to Guide for Parents and Caregivers
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Make a difference: Talk to your child about alcohol
- National PTA: Ten Things You Can Do
- South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services: Prevention Strategies: Family Strategies
- Parents' Source, Drey, Rebecca A: Raising Drug-Free Children
- The Magic Johnson Foundation: The Magic of Good Health: Health Forum, Drugs and Alcohol