

Tips for Grades 4-6

The preteen years are such a great time in kids' lives. They start to consider their place in the world. They become champions of justice. They begin to use complex problem-solving skills, value their friends' opinions much more, and begin to get curious about love and sex. But for a parent, it can also be a bit of a scary time as preteens also begin to question their parents' messages.

Don't take this newfound independence as a sign that you should back off about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. In fact, when it comes to the issue of drug use, this is one of the most important times in a child's life. In a recent survey, more than 100,000 ten- and eleven-year-olds admitted getting drunk once a week. Also, increased exposure to the "gateway drugs" of tobacco, alcohol, and Marijuana put children of this age group at immediate risk. Sure, your advice may be challenged—but it's also heard. Yes, your word is no longer law—but it stays with your child much more than he or she is willing to let on.

The following tips will help you help your child live healthy and drug-free:

- **Make sure your child knows your rules— and that you'll enforce the consequences if rules are broken.** Preteens can understand the reason for rules and appreciate having limits in place. This applies to no-use rules about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs — as well as bedtimes and homework. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.
- **Act out scenes with your child where people offer her drugs.** Give her the tools that help her out of a sticky situation and it's more likely that she'll actually get out of that situation. Kids who don't know what to say or how to get away are more likely to give in to peer pressure. Let her know that she can use you as an excuse and say: "No, my mom [or dad, aunt, etc.] would kill me if I smoked a cigarette." Make sure she knows she shouldn't continue friendships with kids who have offered her drugs.
- **Tell your child what makes him so special.** Puberty can play nasty tricks with a child's self-esteem. At times, your child may move from having good feelings about himself and his life at home and school to some feelings of insecurity, doubt, and pressure. He needs to hear a lot of positive comments about his life and who he is as an individual—not just when he brings home an A.
- **Give your children the power to make decisions that go against their peers.** You can reinforce this message through small things such as encouraging your child to pick the sneakers he likes rather than the pair his four friends have.

- **Base drug and alcohol messages on facts, not fear.** Kids can't argue with facts but their new need for independence may allow them to get around their fears. Also, kids love to learn facts—both run-of-the-mill and truly odd. Take advantage of their passion for learning to reinforce your message about drugs.
- **Let your kids know about the here-and-now problems associated with alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use.** Preteens aren't concerned with future problems that might result from experimentation with tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. They are concerned about their appearance—sometimes to the point of obsession. If they believe drug use will impair their looks and health, they are unlikely to be tempted by these practices. Tell them about the smelly hair and ashtray breath caused by cigarettes. Make sure they know that it would be hard to perform in the school play while high on marijuana.
- **Get to know your child's friends—and their friends' parents.** Check in by phone or a visit once in a while to make sure they are giving their children the same kinds of messages you give your children about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- **Help children separate reality from fantasy.** Watch TV and movies with them and ask lots of questions to reinforce the distinction between what is real and what is make-believe. Remember to include advertising in your discussions, as those messages are especially powerful.

What drugs are in the preteen's world?

- Tobacco
- Alcohol
- Ritalin
- Inhalants
- Marijuana

Source: Drug Free America

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