

Tips for Grades 7-9

Young teens view the world as a giant set of possibilities. While they're often excited to dive in and take on whatever comes their way, they also experience deep confusion about those experiences. They want to be independent and have adult responsibilities but they cling to the familiar for reassurance. They desperately want approval from other teens and are easily swayed by what their peer group feels is appropriate behavior. This is also the first time that kids really get to make choices that have a lasting impact—not just about their clothing for the day or what they want for lunch. In addition, young teens often experience huge changes in their bodies, emotional lives, and relationships. This is the time when many young people try alcohol, tobacco and other drugs for the first time.

Teens are twice as likely to use Marijuana as parents believe they are, and those teens are getting high in the places that parents think are safe havens—around school, at home, and at friends' houses.

- Two-thirds of 8th graders report alcohol use in the past year.
- More than 20% of 8th graders report trying an inhalant.
- Nearly 50% of all 8th graders have tried cigarettes.

But you can help your teen stay healthy and drug-free—and beat the facts. First of all: Stay involved. Young teens may say they don't need your guidance, but they do—especially when it comes to choosing a group of friends to spend time with. Drug use starts as a social behavior. Even if your kids appear to shrug off your advice and rules, they're listening. Keep the following tips in mind as you guide your kids through the young teen years:

- **Make sure your teen knows your rules—and that you'll enforce the consequences if rules are broken.** Teens 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 curfews 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.
- **Let your teen in on all the things you find wonderful about him.** He needs to hear a lot of positive comments about his life and who he is as an individual—not just when he makes the basketball team.
- **Show interest—and discuss—your child's daily ups and downs.** You'll earn your child's trust, know how to talk to each other, and won't take your child by surprise when you voice a strong point of view about drugs.
- **Tell your teen about the negative effect alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs have on physical appearance.** Teens are extremely concerned with their

physical appearance. If they believe drug use will impair their looks and health, they are unlikely to be tempted by these practices. Tell them about a time you saw a friend or acquaintance get sick from alcohol—reinforce how completely disgusting it was.

- **Don't just leave your child's anti-drug education up to his school.** Ask your teens what they've learned about drugs in school and then continue with that topic or introduce new topics. A few to consider: the long-term effects that tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs have on the human body; how and why chemical dependence occurs—including the unpredictable nature of dependency and how it varies from person to person; the impact of drug use on society—societal costs of impaired health and loss of productivity; maintaining a healthy lifestyle; positive approaches to stress reduction; or setting realistic short- and long-term goals.

What drugs are in the preteen's world?

- Tobacco
- Alcohol
- Ritalin
- Inhalants
- Marijuana
- Ecstasy
- Herbal ecstasy
- Cocaine/Crack
- GHB
- Heroin
- Rohypnol
- Ketamine
- LSD
- Mushrooms

Source: Drug Free America

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