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Keeping Your Kids Tobacco Free

What parents need to know

Using tobacco in any form is not safe. Kids need to know the dangers of using any type of tobacco now and in the future, including cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and smokeless (chewing or dipping) tobacco or snuff.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S. Preventing the use of tobacco products in youth is a very important step to help keep kids healthy and to help stop the tobacco epidemic.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the National Cancer Institute (NCI), 27.1% of high school students and 7.2% middle school students reported current tobacco product use in 2018. This was a significant increase in current tobacco use by youth in just one year. In previous years, there had been a decrease in tobacco use among youth. Vaping, or using e-cigarettes, is reported as the most common kind of tobacco use by kids and teens.

You can learn more about the safety and use of tobacco and e-cigarettes by reading [Is Any Type of Smoking Safe?](#)¹ and [What Do We Know about E-cigarettes?](#)², or see [Tobacco and Cancer](#)³ for even more information.

Keep your kids from starting

In most cases, tobacco use starts in pre-teen, teenage, and young adult years. This can be due to social circles, such as friends or kids the same age using tobacco products. They are more likely to use tobacco if a parent also uses tobacco products. Genetics, mental health, low self-esteem, and personal attitudes can also play a role in a young person starting to use tobacco. Kids, teenagers, and young adults in lower income

families and those with lower levels of education have a higher risk of tobacco use. Television, movies, the internet, and social media often advertise and show tobacco products being used by young people, too.

It may be difficult to manage social circles and limit screen time. But it's important for parents to know the facts and to stand up against tobacco use. Concerned parents may have questions about how to talk to their children about using tobacco. Research has shown that **teens whose parents often talk with them about the dangers of tobacco use are about half as likely to smoke as those who don't have these discussions with their parents.** This holds true whether or not the parents use tobacco themselves.

Here are some tips from the CDC for parents to help keep kids tobacco-free:

- Remember that despite the impact of movies, music, the internet, social media, and peers, **parents can be the greatest influence in their kids' lives.**
- Start talking about tobacco use when your children are 5 or 6 years old and continue through their high school years and into college or as they start their career. In many cases, kids start using tobacco products by age 11. And many are addicted by age 14.
- If loved ones have or died from tobacco-related illnesses, let your kids know.
- Let kids know that using tobacco puts a strain on the heart, damages the lungs, and can cause many other health problems, including cancer. Smoke from cigarettes and vapors from e-cigarettes can be also harmful to people who don't use tobacco products but are exposed to them.
- Talk about the harmful effects of nicotine. Nicotine is found in cigarettes, cigars, hookahs, smokeless tobacco, and most e-cigarettes. Nicotine is very addictive. There is evidence that it harms the brain development of teenagers. It can also cause premature births and low birthweight babies if tobacco is used during pregnancy.
- Also talk about what using tobacco can do to the way a person looks and smells: smoking and vaping makes hair and clothes stink, causes bad breath, and can stain teeth and fingernails. Spit and smokeless tobacco can cause bad breath, stained teeth, tooth decay, tooth loss, and bone loss in the jaw.
- Include the actual expense of tobacco use in your talks, and how much money they can save or use on other things instead of tobacco products.
- Know if your kids' friends smoke, vape, or use dip or chew. Talk about ways to say "no" to all forms of tobacco.
- Talk to your kids about the false glamorization of tobacco in the media, such as in ads, movies, social media, and magazines.

The children of parents who use tobacco are much more likely to also be tobacco users. But even if you use tobacco, you can still influence your kids' decisions.

You might even have more power, because you've been there. Your best move, of course, is to quit. Meanwhile, don't use tobacco around your children, don't offer it to them, and don't leave it where they can easily get it. You can speak to your child firsthand about:

- How you got started and what you thought about it at the time
- How hard it is to quit
- How it has affected your health
- What it costs you, financially and socially
- Other lessons you have learned along the way
- What you have done to try to quit, or how you did quit

If you can, keep your home tobacco-free and smoke-free. Don't use tobacco indoors and don't let anyone else do it either. If you have a car or vehicle, make it tobacco-free and smoke-free too.

Help your child quit

If your child has already started using any form of tobacco, including e-cigarettes, try these tips to help them quit:

- Find out why your child is smoking or using other forms of tobacco. Ask questions to find out what kind he or she is using.
- Try to avoid threats and ultimatums. Show interest. Find out what changes can be made in his or her life to help your child quit using tobacco.
- If you use tobacco yourself, try to quit. If you did smoke or use other forms of tobacco and have already quit, tell your child what it was like for you. Personalize the little problems around tobacco use and the big challenge of quitting. Teens and pre-teens often believe they can quit whenever they want, but research shows most teens never do. Try to share these facts with them in a non-threatening way.
- Support your child if they're trying to quit. Both you and your child might need to prepare for the mood swings and crankiness that can come with nicotine withdrawal. Offer your child the 5 Ds to get through the tough times:

Delay: The craving will go away with time. **Deep breath:** Take a few calming deep

breaths. **Drink water:** It will help flush out the chemicals. **Do something else:** Find a new, healthy habit. **Discuss:** Talk about your thoughts and feelings.

- Help your child make a list of the reasons they want to quit. Refer to this list when your child is tempted.
- Finally, reward your child when he or she quits. Plan something special for you to do together.

More reasons to keep your kids away from tobacco

According to a Surgeon General's report, research shows that **youth who use multiple types of tobacco products are at higher risk for becoming dependent on nicotine which might lead to continuing to use tobacco into adulthood.**

Research has also shown that:

- Kids who use tobacco are far more likely to use alcohol and illegal drugs than are non-users.
- Vaping (using e-cigarettes) is strongly linked to later use of regular cigarettes.
- Cigarette smokers are more likely to get into fights, carry weapons, attempt suicide, suffer from mental health problems such as depression, and engage in high-risk sexual behaviors.

These research results don't necessarily mean that tobacco use causes these behaviors, just that they're more common in teens who use tobacco. Other factors figure in as well. For example, teens who smoke and engage in other harmful behaviors are less likely to have supportive parents who are involved with their daily lives.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/tobacco-and-cancer/is-any-type-of-smoking-safe.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/tobacco-and-cancer/e-cigarettes.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/tobacco-and-cancer.html

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