



Stop the silence.
Start the conversation.
Save a life.

Talking about Drugs with Preschoolers

It may seem premature to talk about drugs with preschoolers, but the attitudes they form now are the foundation for the decisions they will make when they're older. Talk often with your preschoolers, and listen often to what they have to say.

1. Playing grownup.

At this early age, children often like to play grownup by pretending to be adults. They mimic what adults do and say. What they hear you say and see you do makes a lasting impression, so when opportunities arise to let your child know how you feel about substance use, share those feelings. If you drive up to the supermarket, for example, and see someone standing outside smoking, tell your child that smoking is harmful and that it causes people to get very sick and sometimes die.

2. Teaching on their level.

Children this age are capable of understanding your explanation about poison and bad things in your home, such as cleaning products, paint, etc. Caution your children to eat or drink only what you, a grandparent, or another caregiver gives them. If your child becomes sick and you administer medicine, use this opportunity to explain that medicine helps the person it is meant for but can harm someone else who takes it. Warn children to never take a drug unless it is meant for them.

3. Short but honest answers.

Preschool children are curious and eager to learn, but they also have relatively short attention spans. When they ask questions, answer honestly but don't overwhelm them with information they aren't capable of understanding. For example, you or another adult family member occasionally drink wine with dinner or enjoy a beer on the weekend. Four-year-old Jimmy wants to know if he can taste it. You might say, "No, Jimmy, this is only for adults who are at least 21 years old. It can make children very sick if they drink it. Why don't you help me fix you a glass of apple juice instead?"

4. Decisions, decisions ...

Even at this early stage of life, it's important to teach your children how to make good decisions. One way to do that is to let your children make their own decisions - but only if they don't endanger their well-being. For example:

- Explain early (and often) about why healthy foods help children grow up to be fit and strong. If they are especially enamored by a fictional character or famous athlete, encourage them to eat healthy foods so they will grow up to be healthy and strong like their idols. This gives your child the background knowledge to make smart food choices.
- When feasible, let your preschooler choose what clothing to wear - even if they make a few mistakes. Letting them choose builds confidence in their own decision-making ability.

For more information, visit www.addictionisreal.org