

How to talk to your kids about drugs if you did drugs.

The fact that you've had experience may actually be an advantage. Read on:

1. THIS ISN'T ABOUT YOU. We all want to warn our kids against the dangers of drug abuse. But the single biggest reason so many of us are reluctant to start the conversation is because we're afraid we'll be asked that uncomfortable question: "Mom, Dad...did you do drugs?" So let's start by stating the obvious: This isn't about what you did or didn't do. It's about what your child is going to do or not do. So let's talk about how your personal experiences might help steer your child in a good direction.

2. EXPERTS DISAGREE. For every psychologist who recommends openness and honesty about your past, another advises caution. The fact is, you can say too much. A good place to start is by considering your child. Some kids demand candor. Others are happy just to talk. Use your judgement. You know your kids better than anyone.

3. WHEN TO LIE. In our opinion? Never. Some parents who used drugs in the past choose not to tell the truth, but risk losing their credibility if their kids discover the real story from a talkative uncle at a family party. Many experts recommend you give an honest answer – or no answer at all.

4. THE WHOLE TRUTH? Try to avoid giving your child more information than she or he asked for. (No need to reveal you smoked marijuana 132 times!) This is not a courtroom; it's a conversation.

5. SAY WHAT YOU MEAN TO SAY. Like other important conversations you'll have with your kids, the point you're trying to make is what really matters. In this case, it's crucial your kids understand that you don't want them to use drugs. Don't beat about the bush; say so. ("I don't want you to use drugs.") Then



give your reasons why. ("Drugs are dangerous, expensive, unpredictable, distracting...") And yes, it's okay to have a lot of reasons.

6. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED? Before you talk, take stock. You've lived your entire life in a culture where drugs are a fact of life. From the headlines on TV to your own experiences, you've seen too many examples of how drugs can change young lives for the worse. Your own experiences with drugs are just part of the bigger picture. The real opportunity here is to share what you've learned.

7. YOU COULD SAY IT LIKE THIS: "I tried drugs because some kids I knew were experimenting, and I thought I needed to try drugs to fit in. It took me a while to discover that's never a very good reason to do anything. Do you ever feel pressured like that?"

8. OR LIKE THIS: "Everyone makes mistakes and trying drugs was a mistake I made. It made me do some dumb things. And it's hard to look back and see that I got anything good out of the experience. I love you too much to watch you repeat bad decisions I made."

9. OR EVEN LIKE THIS: "My experience with drugs is no guarantee that yours would be the same. Drugs affect everyone differently. So I wanted to share my experiences with you, because even if drugs didn't ruin my life, I've seen them ruin other people's lives. And God forbid you should be one of those people."

10. DON'T JUST TALK. LISTEN. You can anticipate that your child's first reaction when you raise the subject of drugs will be to be quiet. So do your darndest to make it a two-way conversation. Ask what they think. Ask if it's a subject their friends talk about. Ask what they think of celebrities who use drugs. Keep asking questions. And listen to the answers.

11. STAY CALM. Whatever happens, try not to raise your voice. If you do lose your temper, try to catch yourself. It's okay to admit that these conversations aren't easy for you, either. And if things aren't going so well, suggest talking about it again another time. ("I didn't mean to surprise you or make you feel awkward. Let's talk again in a day or two.")

12. GOOD LUCK. Yes, it's difficult to know how to talk to your kids about drugs. You don't want them to hold your history up as some kind of a precedent to follow, or as a tool to use against you. But you may be able to use your life experiences as a teachable moment. So even if you're nervous, don't put off having the conversation. This isn't about your past. This is about your child's future.

For more on how to talk to your children about the dangers of drug use, please visit drugfree.org

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