

Helping Hand

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Helping Kids Make Good Decisions about Drugs

Sooner or later, most American children will be offered drugs and will have to make a conscious decision to accept or reject them. How can you make sure your children will make the right choice?

How to Help

“Teachers and parents can help their children learn how to say no when a friend offers drugs by role-playing with them the ways they make tough life choices,” says Ruth Wooden, president of the National Parenting Association in New York. She says, “If kids see how you deal with the tough issues of daily life and how you consider options, your kids will have firsthand experience with their own tough choices.”

When to Watch

Wooden points out two key times to watch for when children may be vulnerable to use drugs.

1. When they are feeling really low

- after a bad test or losing a game
- when a friend moves away

The notion that drugs will make you feel better can have a lot of appeal during the down times.

2. When they are feeling “on top of the world”

- after a string of good luck
- when everything is going right

These times can blind them into believing that they can do anything and it will turn out fine.

Adult Involvement

Children need to involve adults in their lives in order to make clear-headed decisions in both instances. Wooden says, “When they see our decision process, or better yet, when we ask them for their opinion, they get real-life practice in a safe space.”



For more information about teaching children to make good decisions about drugs and alcohol, visit www.theantidrug.com.

Your Child's Question: What is a White Lie?

The concept of a lie is significantly different for a young child than for, say, a preteen. A preschool-age child may think that if he or she believes the lie strongly enough, it will be true. A preteen will lie knowing exactly what is real and what is not, and probably will do so in order to avoid being punished or to exaggerate their self-worth.

A child developing a sense of morality appreciates rigid rules such as “stealing is bad” and “don’t lie.” The idea that there is a gray zone between black and white can be difficult to understand.

Luckily, a “white lie” is easy to talk about. It’s a lie that helps spare hurt feelings. Because this leaves so much room for interpretation, you should give a lot of very concrete examples:

“Your aunt spent a lot of time knitting you this sweater. It’s polite to tell her you like it even if you really don’t. It would hurt her feelings after spending so much time and effort to hear that you don’t like it. But you can tell me you don’t like it.”

Don’t disregard your child’s feelings. Let them tell you he or she doesn’t like something and why. Model good behavior yourself and make a point to say that white lies should be used sparingly. Show your child that telling the truth tactfully is best: “I told grandma that although the dress she bought me for my birthday wasn’t really my style, I love the store she bought it from and I’m sure I will find something wonderful to exchange it for.”

Why Do Some Grownups Smoke?

“If smoking is so bad for you, why do so many grownups smoke?” – Amy, 7 years old

Amy, like many children, is starting to become aware of mixed messages. What she is being taught is different from what happens in the world around her. While posters in school say that smoking is bad for you and does not make you cool, the reality is that many adults (including family members and neighbors whom the child loves and respects) smoke.

When you’re the parent, helping a child make sense of this type of confusion can be challenging. It can be helpful to explain to your child that most people start smoking for the wrong reasons: They ignore the dangers of cigarette smoking; they feel it relaxes them; it makes them feel cool. Then they become addicted, and even if they would like to stop, it’s very difficult to quit. Let your child know that most people who smoke wish they never started smoking in the first place.

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PO Box 99515
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Creative Director: Russ Roozeboom
Publisher: Jane Adams

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The question that often follows is, “If people can get cancer and die from smoking, why don’t they stop?” If your child doesn’t understand the word “addicted,” compare it to a “bad habit” (nail biting, twirling hair, thumb sucking) that is hard to break.

A slightly older child might grasp the concept of denial with an example from his or her life: being allergic to chocolate, but eating it anyway because it tastes good.

To encourage discussion, ask your child about other inconsistent messages he or she has come across. What things do adults do that “break the rules?” Try to keep healthy messages consistent by being a good role model yourself.



TO ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION ABOUT SMOKING

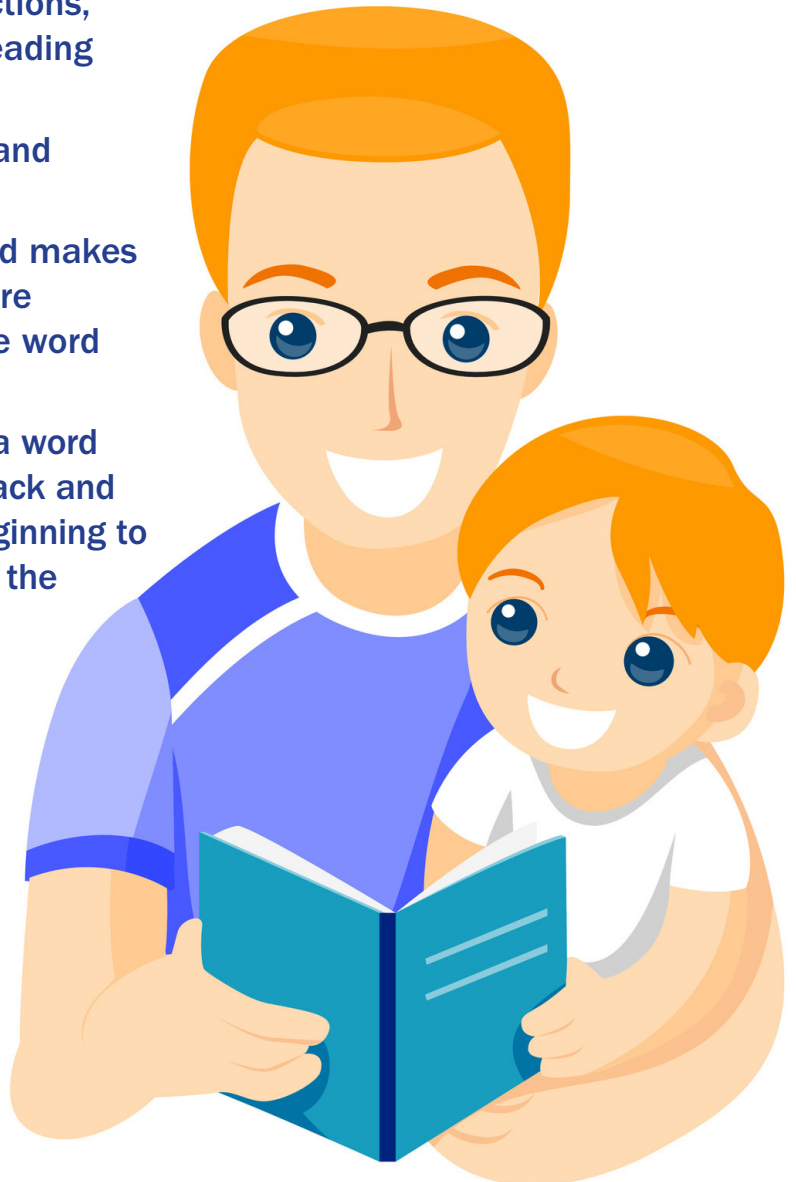
- Ask your child about other inconsistent messages he or she has come across.
- What things do adults do that “break the rules?”
- What messages does television give that seem to contradict standards of good conduct?
- Try to keep healthy messages consistent by being a good role model yourself.

How Parents Can Help with Reading

When mothers and fathers get involved with their children’s homework, communication between the school and family can improve and help clarify for parents what is expected of students. It can give parents a firsthand idea of what students are learning and how well their child is doing in school.

Reading homework tips for parents and young children

- Have your child read aloud to you every night.
- Choose a quiet place, free from distractions, for your child to do his or her nightly reading assignments.
- As your child reads, point out spelling and sound patterns such as cat, pat, hat.
- When your child reads aloud to you and makes a mistake, point out the words that were missed and help him or her to read the word correctly.
- After your child has stopped to correct a word he or she has read, have the child go back and reread the entire sentence from the beginning to make sure he or she understands what the sentence is saying.
- Ask your child to tell you in his or her own words what happened in a story.
- To check your child’s understanding of what is being read, occasionally pause and ask your child questions about the characters and events in the story.
- Ask your child why he or she thinks a character acted in a certain way and ask your child to support the answer with information from the story.

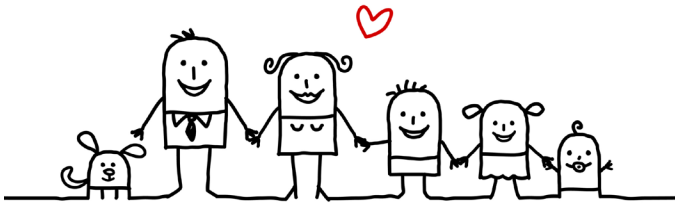


Bedwetting

It's part of childhood and a milestone along the path from toddler to preschooler to school-age kid—sleeping all night without wetting the bed. Of course, parents slowly wean children from diapers to underwear-type diapers to training pants to accomplish this feat during the day and then at night. But for some children, staying dry doesn't happen overnight!

Parents and caregivers can identify with that occasional night when they are awakened to, "Mommy, I wet my bed." This is all normal childhood development.

But when bedwetting becomes a frequent event—let's say your 7-year-old is wetting his or her bed at least twice a week and this goes on for three months or more—then bedwetting is a real concern that can be helped.



Most children grow out of it

Experts agree that children really do grow out of bedwetting as they develop. Bedwetting is not unusual for a 5-year-old. In fact, it's a common problem in children ages 6 to 12. So at any one time, 5 to 7 million children (and their weary parents) can be affected. As children grow older, bedwetting is more common in boys.

Bedwetting is not an emotional, learning or behavioral problem, according to the National Kidney Foundation. In fact, it's not even a problem with the kidneys at all. Children usually don't wet their beds on purpose. There are medical explanations and behavioral and medical solutions.

First, children need to be examined by a physician to rule out a medical problem that may be causing the child to be unable to hold urine until morning. Parents need to be cautioned not to punish children who wet their beds. This simply won't help. Children need patience, support and encouragement.

NOW AVAILABLE

The National Heart Lung and Blood Institute has launched **We Can!** a valuable resource for helping enhance children's activity and nutrition.

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan