

# A parent's guide to raising drug-free kids



As parents, you want your child to be healthy, safe and successful. Underage drinking and drug use can lead to serious problems and get in the way of their goals. Early use of alcohol, marijuana or other drugs puts teens at greater risk for substance use disorder and can hurt their grades at school and other goals.

## Alcohol and marijuana use:

- > **Can begin as early as in elementary school.** One in five teens in Washington start using alcohol or marijuana regularly by 10th grade.<sup>1</sup>
- > **Can harm the teen brain.** Alcohol and marijuana can harm areas of the brain that control movement, impulse control, memory, learning and judgment. Because teens' brains are still developing, they are more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol and other drugs.
- > **Are associated with the top three causes of teen deaths:** Accidents, homicide and suicide. Excessive drinking is responsible for more than 3,500 deaths among youth each year.<sup>2</sup>
- > **Can lead to substance use disorder.** Those who started drinking before age 15 are at least four times more likely to develop alcohol use disorder as adults. This is compared to those who begin drinking at age 21 or later.<sup>3</sup> During 2015, 78% of Washington youth (age 12-17) who received publicly-funded treatment listed marijuana as their primary drug.<sup>4</sup>
- > **Isn't safer at home with you.** If you allow your teen to use alcohol or marijuana at home, they are more likely to think it's okay when they are with their friends. The risks of using alcohol or marijuana are just as great at home as elsewhere.

You have the greatest influence in your child's decisions about alcohol and other drugs—even during the teen years. On the next pages you will find ways to help your child avoid alcohol and other drugs. Learn more at [StartTalkingNow.org](http://StartTalkingNow.org).





# Bonding

## Bonding: close relationships

Children who feel close to their parents are less likely to use alcohol or marijuana. Stay involved in their lives, eat dinner together and do family activities. Talk with your children early and often about the risks of marijuana and other drugs. 83% of Washington teens whose families talk with them about not using alcohol don't drink.<sup>5</sup> Tips to start the conversation:

- > **Look for natural opportunities.** For example, start the conversation when passing an alcohol display in a store.
- > **Be calm.** If you are mad, it will make it harder to talk with your child. Find things that will help relax you. For example, take a walk or call a friend.
- > **Be positive.** If you approach the situation with shame or anger, your efforts may not work. Instead, be respectful and understanding.
- > **Don't lecture.** Lecturing may lead to them shutting down or getting angry. It could also be mistaken for you disapproving of them instead of their actions. This can lead to shame and, in turn, drinking or other drug use.



# Monitoring

## Monitoring: who, what, when, where

Take the time to get to know your child's friends and what your child is doing in their free time. Help them plan safe and fun activities. Call their friends' parents to be sure there is supervision.

Look out for signs your child may be using alcohol, marijuana or other drugs. Pay attention to changes in their mood and personality, behaviors, hygiene, appearance and physical health. If you think your child is using, it is important to act. The Partnership to End Addiction suggests the next steps below:

- > **Prepare.** Make sure you are on the same page if you are talking to your child with another adult. Expect anger and remain calm. Stay focused on the issue. Share any evidence that led you to believe your child is using alcohol, marijuana or other drugs.
- > **Start talking.** The best way to find out what's going on and to begin helping is to talk. Create a safe, open and comfortable place to talk with your child.
- > **Set limits.** Rules and consequences show your child you care about them. A firm consequence such as getting grounded is a reminder of what not to do again.
- > **Use positive reinforcement.** It can be easy to focus on everything the child is doing wrong. Instead, focus on what your child is doing right. When you focus on the positive things, there's a better chance you'll see those behaviors again.
- > **Get additional help.** Reach out to others you trust who know your child, such as pastors or teachers. Use the Washington Recovery Help Line at 1-866-789-1511 or at [WARecoveryHelpline.org](http://WARecoveryHelpline.org) for anonymous, confidential support from professionally-trained staff.



# Boundaries

## Boundaries: rules and consequences

Set clear rules and consequences about not using alcohol or marijuana. Rules are a signal to your child that you care about them and their safety. Consequences are a way of helping them learn. More tips:

- > **Provide compliments.** Call out good choices and healthy behavior. Celebrate when your child does a chore or shares a kind word.
- > **Role play.** Imagine situations where your child could be offered alcohol or marijuana and practice ways to say no.
- > **Understand where your child is coming from.** Peer pressure is real and hard to resist. Children who know what to say and have a plan are more likely to overcome peer pressure.



1. Washington Healthy Youth Survey
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
3. National Institutes of Health
4. Washington Department of Health and Social Services
5. Washington Healthy Youth Survey

Washington State  
Health Care Authority

HCA 82-0058 (9/20)

Talk with your teen and seek help  
if necessary, by calling the:

Washington  
**Recovery Help Line**  
24-Hour Help for Substance Abuse, Problem Gambling & Mental Health  
**1.866.789.1511**  
(206.461.3219 ttt)

To find more  
resources, visit:

  
**StartTalkingNow.org**