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Keeping Your Children Tobacco-free

Children and teens need to know the dangers of using any type of tobacco now and in the future. If possible, these conversations should start early.

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What parents need to know about tobacco

Using tobacco in any form is not safe.

People who start using tobacco before the age of 18 are more likely to continue using it than people who start using tobacco as adults. Parents need to know

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States.

Preventing the use of tobacco products in youth is a very important step to help keep kids healthy and stop the tobacco epidemic. If they've already started using cigarettes, e-cigarettes, or other forms of tobacco, helping kids quit is critical to protecting their health now and later in life.

Why children and teens start using tobacco

Young people are very influenced by the people they see around them and what they see on social media. They are more likely to try tobacco if:

- Their parents or other close family members use tobacco.
- Their friends and people they look up to use tobacco around them or urge them to use tobacco.
- They think everyone else is using tobacco, so they should as well.
- They like to try new things and think that it will be easy to stop using tobacco when they want to.
- They see images of attractive people using tobacco in movies.

Research shows that children and teens whose parents often talk with them about the dangers of tobacco are about half as likely to use it as those who don't have these discussions with their parents. This is true whether or not the parents use tobacco themselves.

Keeping your child from starting

Parents can be the greatest influence in their children's lives. Parents can help their children and teens better understand how addictive tobacco is, and how it can affect their health.

Start talking about tobacco when your child is 5 or 6 years old.

Continue through their high school years and into young adulthood. In many cases, children start using tobacco products by age 11 and many are addicted by age 14.

Here are some things you can share with your children to help keep them tobacco-free:

- Nicotine is found in cigarettes, cigars, hookahs, smokeless tobacco, and most e-cigarettes. It is very addictive.
- Using tobacco puts a strain on the heart, damages the lungs, and can cause many other health problems, including cancer.
- Nicotine can harm the brain development of teenagers.
- If tobacco is used during pregnancy, nicotine can cause premature births and low birthweight babies.
- Smoke from cigarettes (second-hand smoke) and vapors from e-cigarettes (second-hand aerosol) can harm people who don't use tobacco products but are exposed to them.

If a loved one has a tobacco-related illness, or has died from one, let your kids know. This might help them better understand the impact of tobacco on health.

Tell them how expensive tobacco use can be over time. Help them understand how much money they can save (or use on other things) if they aren't spending it on tobacco products.

Also talk about how using tobacco can affect the way a person looks and smells. It can make your hair and clothes stink, cause bad breath, and stain your teeth and fingernails. Spit and smokeless tobacco can cause bad breath, stained teeth, tooth decay, tooth loss, and bone loss in the jaw.

To help your children deal with peer pressure and other influences:

- Talk about ways to say “no” to all forms of tobacco.
- Know if your kids' friends smoke, vape, or use dip or chew.
- Talk to your kids about how tobacco is made to look cool or appealing in the media, including ads, movies, social media, and magazines.

Learn more:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides data, reports, and other resources on youth tobacco prevention as well as information about [youth e-cigarette use](#)¹.

The Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids has [helpful information for schools](#)² to help kids stay tobacco free.

Helping your child quit

If your child has already started using any form of tobacco, including e-cigarettes, here are a few things you can try to help them quit:

- **Ask questions.** Find out why your child is using tobacco. Ask questions to find out what kind they are using.
- **Avoid threats.** Show interest. Find out what changes can be made in their life to help them quit using tobacco.
- **Quit with them.** 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. Talk about the challenges 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.

Programs and resources

There are programs and resources that have been developed specifically for teenagers and young adults to help them quit. These include:

[Resources to Help Youth Reject or Quit Vaping³](#) (CDC)

[Digital Quitting Program⁴](#) (Truth Initiative)

[How to Help a Child Quit Vaping⁵](#) (Truth Initiative)

[N-O-T: Not On Tobacco—Proven Teen Smoking and Vaping Cessation Program⁶](#)
(American Lung Association)

[Become a Smokefree Teen⁷](#)

Hyperlinks

1. www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/youth.html
2. www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0153.pdf
3. www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/youth-quit.html
4. truthinitiative.org/exprogram
5. www.becomeanex.org/ex-resources/how-to-help-someone-else-quit/help-a-child-quit-vaping/
6. www.lung.org/quit-smoking/helping-teens-quit/not-on-tobacco
7. teen.smokefree.gov/
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco/e-cigarettes-vaping.html
9. smokingcessationleadership.ucsf.edu/

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). E-cigarette Use Among Youth. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/youth.html> on August 29, 2024.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Protecting Youth From the Harms of Vaping. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/protecting-youth.html> on August 29, 2024.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Youth and Tobacco Use. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/php/data-statistics/youth-data-tobacco/index.html> on October 11, 2024.

Mylocopos G, Wennberg E, Reiter A, et al. Interventions for Preventing E-Cigarette Use Among Children and Youth: A Systematic Review. *Am J Prev Med.* 2024;66(2):351-370. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2023.09.028

US Food and Drug Administration. *Results from the Annual National Youth Tobacco Survey.* Accessed at <https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/youth-and-tobacco/results-annual-national-youth-tobacco-survey> on October 11, 2024.

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