



Tobacco

Before talking . . . be prepared:

Realize the importance of keeping your child from becoming a smoker. Nicotine is a drug, and addictive. Understand that when kids start smoking cigarettes at a young age, they are more comfortable with the idea of trying alcohol and other drugs.

Come to terms with your own attitude toward tobacco. If you smoke or use tobacco, consider that you increase the likelihood that your child will also. Children “listen” to what they see, not what they hear.

Think about this: no one can smoke without harming his or her body—no ifs, ands or butts.

Ready To Talk?

Conversation with your child can and should start at an early age. Look for teachable moments to point out the downsides of smoking and the difficulty of breaking the habit. After a visit at a neighbor's, for instance, you might say, “I like Mrs. Carter a lot, but I sure don't like the way her house smells of cigarette smoke.” When your child asks why Uncle Mac smokes, you can point out, “It's really hard to quit smoking, and he wishes he'd never started.” If you find your child pretending to smoke, ask why she would want to do that. Explain that smoking puts bad chemicals in her body – the same chemicals used to clean toilet bowls and poison rats.

Demonstrate the importance you place on health by not allowing people to smoke in your home, and explain to your child the dangers of secondhand smoke.

A young child will readily agree that smoking is gross and unhealthy. Laying this foundation is an important start in prevention, but you'll need to go further in preparing your child as she heads toward adolescence. The seven-year-old who thought smoking was nasty may still be willing to give it a try when at ten or eleven she's feeling independent and/or facing peer pressure. Help your child in these ways:

- * Explain the health hazards of using tobacco (the increased risk of cancers, stroke, high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, bronchitis) and the cosmetic damage (stained teeth and hands, unpleasant breath, early and increased wrinkling around mouth and eyes).
- * Tell your child about relevant medical history – family illnesses or deaths related to tobacco use.
- * Point out that if she wants to enjoy and excel in sports and music (singing, playing horn and woodwind musical instruments), she needs healthy lungs.
- * Instill in your child early on healthy ways of coping with stress – physical activity, writing down feelings in a journal, enjoying the companionship of a pet.
- * Limit the opportunities where your child might be tempted to smoke – playing at a friend's whose parents aren't home or going to an unsupervised party.
- * Help your child come up with a ready answer if he's pressured to smoke: “I'm so cool I don't have to prove it by smoking.”





- * Make clear the consequences of his behavior, and that as his parent you will not allow him to risk his health by smoking any more than you would allow him to swim in dangerous waters.
- * Tally up the cost of buying cigarettes over the course of 1 year, 5 years, a lifetime – and talk about how the money could otherwise be spent.
- * Discuss with your child tobacco ads. Point out what's misleading: a model who really smokes won't have beautiful teeth and skin. Make your child aware of advertising and products – like flavored dip – aimed toward youth. Tell him to be smarter than advertisers!

Tobacco Facts

Fiction: Tobacco is not a drug.

Fact: Tobacco contains nicotine, a drug that is addictive.

Bonus Fact: Cigarettes also contain carbon monoxide, ammonia, acetone, arsenic, butane, cyanide, and other poisons!

Fiction: Smoking hurts only the smoker.

Fact: Secondhand smoke is harmful. For instance, a child exposed to smoke from a parent's cigarette is more likely to have sore throats and ear infections.

Bonus Fact: Women who smoke while pregnant are more likely to have babies with low, unhealthy birth weight.

Fiction: It's OK to try smoking, it's easy to quit.

Fact: Tobacco is highly addictive. One third of young people who just "experiment" with smoking become addicted by age 20.

Bonus Fact: Cigars and pipes carry the same risks as cigarettes, and more.

Bonus Bonus Fact: Weight control is best managed by healthy eating and exercising.

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