

Talking to your children

- Try to make conversations as normal as possible. Avoid one-off 'Big Chats' and keep coming back to the topics.
- Regular conversations mean your child is more likely to come and talk to you when they need to.
- There are often stories in the media which you can use as a springboard to conversations.
- Start from a young age. Begin with discussions about staying safe at home, around water, roads and the railway. Talking about the medicines they use is another great starting point. They'll be ready and used to it when older and you talk about drugs, alcohol, vaping and knife crime more openly. (The 'what your child will cover at school' section of our Family Hub will help you know when topics are covered and should be discussed)
- Be open and honest. If you don't know the answer to a question it's OK to do some research, find out and come back to them. Better than guessing or telling them something inaccurate. (The 'Website support and advice' section of our Family Hub has some reliable sources of further information)
- Explain risks from a position of caring. You want them to stay safe and they are more likely to listen.
- Be clear on your own beliefs.
- Actively listen to what your child has to say. Maintain eye contact, keep body language positive, acknowledge what they say but don't interrupt. A formal gathering around a table isn't necessary but listening while you do something else like cook, wash up or watch the TV is less effective. While driving or walking the dog is better.
- Stay calm. Getting angry or being judgemental closes communication down. They'll not tell you things you need to know if they know you'll get angry.
- Giving your child the facts, health effects and what the law says from a reliable source in a calm manner will help them when they need to use this information to stay safe. (try www.talktofrank)
- Ask 'Open Questions'. These are questions which can't be answered with a No or Yes. "Tell me about the party" will create an opportunity for a conversation. "Was the party good?" will normally lead to a one word answer.
- Encouraging young people to have these conversations puts their safety first and creates a space for support.
- If you don't have these conversations, someone else will, meaning the risk of inaccurate information from friends or online increases.
- Be specific and don't lump all drugs together. Medicines are drugs to, Alcohol is a drug, the relative level of harm between e.g. Nicotine, Cannabis and Heroin need exploring (our '1 page read' resources for parents on our Family Hub will be helpful here)
- Research suggests that discussing resilience and decision making skills alongside the facts can be more effective.

Why might young people take drugs?

- Knowing why some young people take drugs will help you understand when you speak to your child. There are many reasons: To have fun, to fit in, to experiment, to escape.

Set up plans

- How will you stay safe when going out with friends?
- What will you do if you need help? Make sure they know numbers of people who will help them.
- Talk to parents of your children's friends. Creating, agreeing and sticking to consistent rules and boundaries will help.

Model

- What example are you setting your children? They'll view your actions as normal. They are more likely to try drugs or drink excessively if they see you doing it.
- Demonstrate resilience and sensible decision making.