

Difficult Discussions about Smoking

If your child thinks smoking is cool, you will have to make the case against smoking without attacking your child. You have to be reasonable and rational. You may want to use these guidelines to help your child see the big picture of how smoking can affect their lives:



- Stay focused on the immediate negative effects of smoking.
- Your child will not be worried about the possibility of cancer that may happen years from now. Focus on the things such as bad breath, smelly clothes, stained fingernails and teeth, losing their breath quickly, and how this will affect their athletic ability, and the high price for just one pack of cigarettes. You could also ask them to compute how much money people spend on cigarettes in a week, or a month, and all the other interesting things they could do with that money.
- It is much easier to start explaining the negative effects of smoking to a younger child than to a teenager, so begin your conversations on this topic early by explaining smoking as a health hazard.
- Ask your child if any of their friends smoke and how they feel about smoking. Ask your child if they have ever been pressured by friends to try smoking. If they indicate that most of their friends don't smoke, emphasize that it's only a minority of kids who do.
- Impose consequences like loss of privileges if your child is caught smoking, so the behavior is not condoned.
- Explain how strong the addiction to nicotine can become, and how people after smoking for several years may want to quit, but cannot do it without outside help.

Encourage your child to say "No" to cigarettes and tobacco, just as much as you do for drugs and alcohol. You may want to help your child come up with their own short "script"-the actual words they will use in a situation where they are offered a cigarette, or when they feel pressured to smoke. The words should be their own, but should be clear and simple. Helping them practice what to say in an actual situation will make them feel more confident and prepared.

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