



Every single day in America, thousands of children and teens are making the unhealthy choice of smoking their first cigarette. Incredibly, almost half of them will become regular smokers. What they don't know is that nearly one-third of them will eventually die as a result of their smoking. The average teenage smoker starts at age 14 and becomes a daily smoker before age 18. Once they become addicted it is very hard to quit.

Despite state laws prohibiting the sale of tobacco to minors, tobacco is readily available to them.

Teens often tell their worried parents that they are just smoking temporarily and that they can—and will—quit very soon. They may underestimate the hold that cigarettes have on them and most do not believe that they will become addicted. However, research shows that only 5 percent of teen smokers believe they will still be smoking in 5 years. Studies show that upwards of 70 percent of these same teens are still smoking 7 to 9 years later.

Although the teen years are sometimes tough, it is still your job as a parent to protect them from harm—even when they don't think they need it.

## FACTS ABOUT TEEN SMOKING

- Each day, approximately 3,900 young people between the ages of 12 and 17 smoke their first cigarette, and about 1,500 of these teens become daily cigarette smokers.
- Twenty percent of high school students in the United States report that they have smoked in the past 30 days.
- Those who begin smoking at an early age are more likely to develop a severe addiction to nicotine than those who start at a later age. Of adolescents who have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime, most of them report that they would like to quit, but are not able to do so.
- Tobacco use in adolescence is associated with many other health risk behaviors, including higher risk sexual behavior and use of alcohol or other drugs.
- Tobacco use in adolescence is associated with depression.

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**In The Spotlight...**

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## Suggestions for helping your teen

Parents have tremendous power to influence the choices of their children if they choose to use it. Here are a few suggestions that will help.

If you discover that your teen is smoking, you should:

- Express your concern and disappointment.
- Be very clear that you do not want him to smoke.
- Learn the facts about nicotine addiction and the smoking cessation process.
- Educate your child about the effects and dangers of smoking.
- Show him the real cost of smoking. Show him what he could buy in just a few months if he quits smoking. For example, 2 packs of cigarettes per day cost more than \$180 per month.
- Discuss restrictions that will be imposed if she continues.
- Never bluff or threaten out of anger. Remember the goal is to prevent a horrible addiction from getting started.
- If necessary, get professional help.