



A Guide for Military Parents

DRUGFREEAZ.org

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, Arizona Affiliate



As a parent in a military family, you know that a lot of ups and downs come with the territory. The members of your family are strong, proud and resilient. But you're also faced with many challenges - deployment, moves, possible injury - and it's often hard to know how to talk about these challenges with your child. That's why we've created this guide, specifically for military families.



Inside you'll learn:

- ★ How to say it – Start the conversation with your son or daughter
- ★ How to teach kids to turn down drugs
- ★ How to answer the question: “Did you ever use drugs?”
- ★ The Top 5 Reasons Teens Use Drugs
- ★ What to do now if you're worried about your child.



HOW TO SAY IT



★ ★ ★ Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with—and protect—their kids. But when tackling some of life's tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge.

The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your child—and keep them going throughout his or her life.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Scenario: Your child is starting middle school in a new town and you know that eventually, he will be offered drugs and alcohol.

What to say: *There are a lot of changes ahead of you in middle school. I know we talked about drinking and drugs when you were younger, but now is when they're probably going to be an issue. I'm guessing you'll at least hear about kids who are experimenting, if not find yourself some place where kids are doing stuff that is risky. I just want you to remember that I'm here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the stuff you hear or see. Don't think there's anything I can't handle or that you can't talk about with me, okay?*

Scenario: You find out that kids are selling prescription drugs at your child's school. Your child hasn't mentioned it and you want to get the conversation about it started.

What to say: *Hey, you probably know that parents talk to each other and find things out about what's going on at school... I heard there are kids selling pills—prescriptions that either they are taking or someone in their family takes. Have you heard about kids doing this?*

HIGH SCHOOL

Scenario: During a parent's deployment, you notice your teen starting to act out - she's breaking curfew and spending time with friends you haven't heard about before.

What to say: *If you ask your teen why she's behaving this way and you get mumbles in response, try asking more specific questions on the topics that interest both of you ("What time do you think is fair to ask you to be home on a Saturday night?" "What happened to [insert name of old friend] - I've noticed you haven't been hanging out with her lately." "[Insert name of new friend] seems fun; how did you meet him?").*

If the answers you receive still make you think something's off, try saying, "Honey, I know it's really hard when Mom/Dad is gone, and it's completely natural to want to do things that help you take your mind off her/him. But breaking house rules and doing risky things are not the ways to make yourself feel better. I want you remember that you can always talk to me about how you're really feeling. I want us to be able to talk about this stuff."

Scenario: Your high schooler comes home drunk for the first time.

What to say: *"The response should be measured, quiet and serious - not yelling, shouting or overly emotional," says parenting expert Marybeth Hicks. "Your child should realize that this isn't just a frustrating moment like when he doesn't do a chore you asked for; it's very big, very important, and very serious."*

First, evaluate the situation. If your teen is truly drunk, you should wait until the next morning, when he's sober, to talk. Then say, "I'm really upset that you're drinking. I need to get a handle on how often this has been happening and what your experiences have been so far. I get that you're worried about being in trouble, but the worst part of that moment is over-I know that you're experimenting. The best thing you can do now is really be straight with me, so for starters, tell me about what happened last night..."

If your teen sees you or his other parent drinking regularly, he may accuse you of being hypocritical. In this case, tell him, "I hate to say 'do as I say, not as I do,' but in this particular situation, I have to. Parents aren't perfect and sometimes we make the mistake of drinking more than we should, but I love you too much to watch you do the same thing."

HOW TO TEACH KIDS TO TURN DOWN DRUGS

★ ★ ★ Before you work with your child on this issue, there's one thing you need to know: kids don't usually get drugs from strangers. They get drugs from their friends. And that's the toughest issue of all, teaching your kids that it's okay to say no to their friends—the people they look to for validation, recognition, and fun. Strongly encourage your child to avoid friendships with kids who use drugs.

A great way to help kids prepare for drug-related situations is by acting out—also known as role playing—scenarios with them. It's important to practice these scenarios with your kids before these situations really happen.

Remember, teens rarely verbally pressure or chastise each other into drinking or doing drugs. Rather, the offer is usually casual. “Peer pressure” is more internal than you probably think. For example, your child sees other teens that she wants to be friends with enjoying a drink or a drug and she feels like she wants to be part of it too. Or, she may be afraid that the other teens will think she is less cool if she doesn't join them. Try to include this dynamic when you act out scenarios with your teens.

Scenario: Your daughter is with a small group of girls at the house of a friend who also has a dad in the military. The friend's father is injured, and one of the girls suggests raiding the medicine cabinet and taking some of his prescription painkillers to get high. Take the role of the girl trying to persuade the rest of the group.

What to say: *Help your child develop firm but friendly responses. Make sure she understands Rx medication - why it's helpful for some people and why it can be very dangerous for people who use it without a prescription. Reassure your daughter that her friends will respect her decision not to get involved. Let her know that people are pretty focused on themselves, which leaves much less brain space for them to be concerned with what others do.*

And, if it's appropriate, remind your daughter that as a military child, she has some added responsibility - not just for herself, but for her parents and siblings, too. Tell her that getting into trouble on official quarters can be detrimental to her military parent's career and possibly the entire family's living arrangements.

Again, help her develop firm but friendly responses and reassure her that good friends will respect her decision not to try it.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES FOR YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER TO SAY WHEN OFFERED DRUGS:

“No, thanks.”

“Nah, I'm not into that.”

“Nah, I'm ok. Thanks.”

“No, thanks. I'm on the _____ team and I don't want to risk it.”

“Nah, I'm training for _____.”

“No. I gotta go soon.”

“No, my parents drug test me every week.”

ANSWERING THE QUESTION: “DID YOU EVER DO DRUGS?”

TIPS

For many parents, the answer is simply “no.” However, this may be a tough question to answer for other parents. The conversation doesn't have to be awkward. You can use it to your advantage by turning it into a teachable moment.

Experts believe it's best to tell the truth. However, it's not necessary to share details. Use the discussion as an opportunity to speak openly about what attracted you to drugs, alcohol or tobacco, why they are dangerous, and why you want your child to avoid making the same mistake. Remember, **the issue isn't about your past. It's about your child's future. What's important now is that your kid understands that you don't want him to use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.**

HOW TO SPOT DRUG OR ALCOHOL USE

★ ★ ★ ★ Mood swings and unpredictable behavior are sometimes evidence of teenage “growing pains,” but can also point to use of drugs or alcohol. Be aware of any unexplained changes and know the potential warning signs:

- ★ She’s withdrawn, depressed, tired, or careless about her personal grooming.
- ★ He’s hostile, uncooperative, and frequently breaks curfew.
- ★ Her relationships with family members have deteriorated.
- ★ He’s hanging around with a new group of friends.
- ★ Her grades have slipped and she’s missing school.
- ★ He’s lost interest in hobbies, sports, and other favorite activities.
- ★ Her eating and sleeping patterns have changed; she’s up at night and sleeps during the day.
- ★ He has a hard time concentrating.
- ★ Her eyes are red-rimmed and her nose is runny but she doesn’t have allergies or a cold.
- ★ Household money has been disappearing.
- ★ You have found any of the following in your home: pipes, rolling papers, small medicine bottles, eye drops, butane lighters, homemade pipes or bong (pipes that use water as a filter) made from soda cans or plastic beverage containers.



OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS MAY EXIST

TIPS

Some of the warning signs listed on the left could also point to broader health problems, such as an emotional issue, physical or mental illness. **Research suggests that as many as half of all kids involved with drugs or alcohol are affected by mental health problems.** Before you choose a course of action, discuss your observations with your child's doctor.

TRANSITIONS AND TEENS



★ ★ ★ They say that “the only thing permanent in life is change,” and as the parent in a military family, you know that that’s true. Between moves and deployments, your family life is in constant transition. Unfortunately, studies show that adolescents who haven’t used drugs are more likely to start during times of transition in order to cope with stress. But don’t worry – while change is a part of the military life, risky behavior, like using drugs and alcohol, doesn’t have to be. By knowing what transitions usually affect military kids the most and why, it will be easier for you to recognize the situations in which your child might need more support.

THE TRANSITION: Your family has just relocated to a different town.

WHY IT’S TOUGH: *Military kids move more often than other kids and may be used to starting over, but don’t take for granted that your child will adjust easily to a new routine. Being the new kid in school is hard! Your teen is probably worried about meeting new people and making friends in this unfamiliar environment. Plus, kids often target a group or clique that they want to become friendly with – but they either feel unwelcome or don’t know how to fit in.*

Source: The Partnership at DrugFree.org

THE TRANSITION: You or your spouse deploy.

WHY IT'S TOUGH: *Your teen has to adjust to living with only one parent, which usually means taking on much more responsibility – helping out with younger siblings, doing extra chores and supporting the parent at home. It's also hard for kids to concentrate in school when they're missing or worried about Mom or Dad, and this can lead to poor grades and instances of acting out or talking back.*

THE TRANSITION: You or your spouse return from duty injured, ill or distracted.

WHY IT'S TOUGH: *Just like their injured parent, kids are forced to adapt to a whole new routine – helping Mom get around the house, finding new ways to play sports with Dad. The new and unexpected responsibility can be scary and overwhelming. And when a parent has an invisible wound – such as PTSD or a Traumatic Brain Injury – instead of a visible wound, kids might not understand the issue. Teens tend to blame themselves when their parents seem angry or sad, even if it has nothing to do with them.*

TOP 5 REASONS TEENS USE DRUGS DURING TRANSITIONS

- ★ To combat loneliness, low self-esteem, anxiety, or depression
- ★ To mentally “check out” of family issues or school trouble
- ★ To ease discomfort in an unfamiliar situation
- ★ To look cool or change their image/reputation
- ★ To fit in with a desired group of friends



INTERVENE NOW



IF YOU'RE WORRIED – INTERVENE NOW

Military kids are admirable children who stay reliable and strong for their parents and siblings. But because of the challenges they face almost daily, they are also more likely to suffer from stress and anxiety. Also, sometimes it's hard for military parents to notice developing problems in their children because their kids sometimes feel they can't show weakness at home.

HAVE AN INFORMAL INTERVENTION

An intervention doesn't have to be an angry or dramatic confrontation. A powerful way to intervene is to have a conversation with your kid. Letting her know that you don't want her to use drugs or alcohol and sharing your reasons is a perfectly acceptable and responsible place to start.

TIPS TO HELP PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS INTERVENE

- ★ Hold a conversation when your child is not high or drunk, and when you can be calm and rational.
- ★ Explain that your love and desire for your child's safety and well-being is the basis for your concern.
- ★ Try to remain neutral and non judgmental.
- ★ Tell your child the warning signs you've observed in her behavior that have made you concerned. Openly voice your suspicions, but avoid direct accusations.
- ★ Listen to everything your child has to say. If she brings up related problems, promise you'll address them later. Reiterate that what you are addressing at the moment is her drug use, which is a serious health issue and may be at the core of other problems.
- ★ If you need help during the conversation, involve another family member, your child's guidance counselor, or a physician.

FOR KIDS IN CRISIS

GET HELP

As with any health issue, an important first step is to get a professional evaluation of your child's condition. Call your doctor, local hospital, or state or local substance abuse agency for a referral.

Drug addiction is a treatable disease. And with proper treatment, you, your child and your family can live healthy, drug-free lives.

If it's determined that your child has developed a pattern of drug use or an addiction, the next step could be a drug treatment program.

Your school district may have a counselor who can refer you to treatment programs. Parents whose children have been through treatment programs may also be a good source of information.

TALKING POINT: WHEN PARENTS COME HOME "DIFFERENT"



When parents are stressed, their kids are stressed – and according to a recent Partnership study, stress is the number one reason teens try drugs. So if you or your spouse has recently come home from deployment injured, anxious or emotionally distant, try saying one of the following to your teen:

I know it's frustrating that Mom isn't as funny or talkative as she used to be. Unfortunately, sometimes, when people are deployed, they come back with emotional pain instead of physical pain. But I promise you, you've done nothing wrong, and Mom still loves you very much, even when she seems upset.

It must be really confusing to feel like you miss someone who's actually physically here. But it's normal for you to miss the person Dad was before he left home. I miss that person, too. It's okay for us to talk about this, and it's okay for you to ask for help dealing with these feelings if you ever need it.

NEED HELP? GET HELP!

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, Arizona Affiliate

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The Partnership at DrugFree.org

www.drugfree.org • Comprehensive information, resources and tips from experts and other parents; opportunities to connect and share experiences with other families.

Community Information Referral

602-263-8856 or 800-352-3792

www.abovetheinfluence.com

Website for teens dedicated to preventing underage drinking and drug use.

24 hour Access to Care Line

877-931-9142

Az Parents Connect is designed to connect parents with the information they need to inspire their child to lead a healthy, drug-free life.

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