



Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



Click here to print a PDF of this article so you can start a conversation with your child

Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

Know! encourages you to share this Parent Tip with friends and family.

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Start Talking!

Building a Drug-Free Future

*My little eyes look up to you; you must be ten feet tall.
My little ears hear what you say; I listen to it all.*

*I see with your friends; and how you act with mom and dad.
I notice how you do in school; and your choices – good and bad.*

*My big sibling – you're the greatest; I want to be just like YOU.
I'll keep watching and keep learning; so please be careful what you do.*

Know! The Big Sibling Effect!

There is a unique and special connection between siblings that cannot be denied nor duplicated. They are both tormentors and protectors; a source of teasing one moment, the greatest ally the next. Siblings are also likely to be one and other's longest-lasting relationship. Four out of five Americans get to experience the growing years with a brother or sister, and in most families the older siblings serve as role models for the younger ones. The influence of older siblings is so powerful in fact, that it is said to rival that of peers and many times outweigh parental influence - for the better or worse.

Let's start with the "worse." When it comes to risky behaviors, research shows that younger siblings are likely to emulate the behaviors and actions of their older siblings. A girl whose teen sister becomes pregnant is four to six times more likely to become a teen mom herself. A younger sibling whose older brother or sister drinks underage is twice as likely to drink underage as well. If that older sibling is a cigarette smoker, the younger sibling is four times as likely to take up the habit. When older siblings use marijuana and other drugs, the risk for use among their younger siblings also increases substantially.

An interesting finding however, is that the closer in age the siblings, the less likely the younger one is to follow in the footsteps of the older sibling. Some experts say this to be due, in part, to the younger sibling wanting to stand out from his or her older sibling, which could be a positive or a negative, depending on the situation.

As for the "better" news; good behavior role modeling by older siblings is believed to be just as contagious among younger brothers and sisters. An adolescent is more likely to have a negative attitude toward substance use and make more positive decisions in general, when his or her older sibling chooses to be drug-free and demonstrates other healthy lifestyle behaviors.

It's important to be aware and to share! The first step in drug prevention is awareness. The second piece is conveying that information to your children. First and foremost, make sure you're talking with your older and younger children on a regular and ongoing basis (age-appropriate of course) about the dangers of substances.



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When speaking with older siblings: Stress the importance of their decision-making and how it not only impacts their life, but the life of their younger siblings who look up to them.

When speaking with younger siblings: Talk with them about the fact that they are not destined to repeat their older siblings' negative behavior. Empower younger siblings by reminding them that they are their own person, fully capable of making healthier, more positive lifestyle choices, and avoiding the same mistakes that their older sibling may have made.

Sources: [Academia: Sibling Influence on Adolescent Alcohol, Cigarette, and Marijuana Drug Use](#). Benjamin Guild Gibbs, June 2005. [Europe PMC - Sibling influences on adolescent substance use: the role of modeling, collusion, and conflict](#). [Huffington Post: Proof There's Nothing Quite Like A Sibling Bond](#), Aug. 2014. [NPR: Health News - Big Sibling's Big Influence: Some Behaviors Run In The Family](#), April 2013. [Nursing Schools: 15 Fascinating Scientific Facts About Siblings](#), May 2011.

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