

# **DRUGS**

## **Ages 13 to 17**

Kids this age are likely to know other kids who use alcohol or drugs, and may be still willing to express their thoughts or concerns with parents about it.

Use these conversations not only to understand your child's thoughts and feelings, but also to talk about the dangers of using drugs. Talk about the legal issues — jail time and fines — and the medical issues — the possibility that they or someone else might be killed or seriously injured.

Teens are often given misinformation about drug use, particularly marijuana, including that it is a “natural” substance. This is especially true at this time with legalization being so prevalent in the media. Make sure that your child understands that marijuana contains many chemical additives to make the active drug more potent and addictive, and that there is potential for it to be laced with deadlier drugs.

Marijuana studies show that with use; concentration and attention skills are reduced, it impairs perception, memory, decision making ability and learning, the immune system is compromised, mental disorders may be triggered including depression, psychosis, social withdrawal and schizophrenia and causes significantly more damage to cells and DNA than tobacco use. A teen’s emotional and cognitive maturity becomes stuck at the age in which they begin using marijuana. This is why you will hear adults defending their own drug use.

## **Laying Good Groundwork**

No parent, child, or family is immune to the effects of drugs. Some of the best kids can end up in trouble, even when they have made an effort to avoid it and even when they have been given the proper guidance from their parents.

However, certain groups of kids may be more likely to use drugs than others. Kids who have friends who use drugs are likely to try drugs themselves. Those feeling socially isolated for whatever reason may turn to drugs.

So it's important to know your child's friends — and their parents. Be involved in your children's lives.

A warm, open family environment — where kids are encouraged to talk about their feelings, where their achievements are praised, and where their self-esteem is bolstered — encourages kids to come forward with their questions and concerns. When censored in their own homes, kids go elsewhere to find support and answers to their most important questions.

Make talking and having conversations with your children a regular part of your day. Finding time to do things you enjoy together as a family helps everyone stay connected and maintain open communication.

If you are looking for more resources for yourself or your child, contact Alberta Health Services Addictions at 780-542-5669.