



Pierce County

PREVENTION PROGRAM
with Arbor Place, Inc.

Talking to Your Teen About Drugs & Alcohol

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

A Letter From Us

Teens are at a significant point in their lives, developmentally speaking. They are figuring out who they are, developing important life skills, and identifying their likes and dislikes. If they start experimenting with drugs and alcohol, they may be unknowingly setting themselves up for a long-term, potentially life-threatening habit.

That's why teen substance use prevention is so important. And it starts right at home.

In this guide, we'll walk you through the entire process, with tips for before, during, and after the conversations with your teen. It doesn't have to be a scary confrontation between you and your teen, it can be an open dialogue with space for grace for both of you.

As you go through this guide, if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. We have decades of experience and are ready to help you navigate this tough subject. We have also included additional resources later on in the guide.

Thank you for taking the first step by downloading this guide. We're honored to support you in your goal of preventing substance use in your teen.

Talk soon,

Jill Gamez
Executive Director, Arbor Place, Inc.



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Teen Substance Use

We've compiled data from a variety of trustworthy sources to illustrate how common substance use in teens is. Right now, the most common substances include alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana. For more information, visit any of the listed sources throughout this guide.




Alcohol Use

National Averages (2019)

-  Nearly 57% of all high school students reported using alcohol at least once.
-  Percentage increases with grade level: 43% of 9th graders; 53% of 10th graders; 63% of 11th graders; and 68% of 12th graders
-  Around 20% of all high schoolers reported having their first drink BEFORE the age of 13.

Source: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/alcohol/youth-use.htm>



Wisconsin Averages (2019)

-  Over 40% of Wisconsin 12th graders consumed alcohol in the past month.
-  Percentage increases with grade level: 55% of 10th graders; 62% of 11th graders; and 67% of Wisconsin Seniors.
-  Around 20% of all Wisconsin high schoolers who reported alcohol use also reported having their FIRST drink BEFORE the age of 13.

Source: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/alcohol/youth-use.htm>



Tobacco Use

National Averages (2020)

-  Nearly 24% of all high school students reported using any type of tobacco products.
-  OF the ~24% that reported any tobacco use, 20% reported using e-cigarettes.

Source: https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/-fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use/index.htm#current-estimates





Wisconsin Averages (2019)

-  Approximately 30% of Wisconsin high school students use tobacco products.
-  OF the ~30% that reported any tobacco use, 21% of Wisconsin high school students use e-cigarettes.

Source: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/tobacco/index.htm>

Marijuana Use

National Averages

-  7% of 8th graders; 17.3% of 10th graders; and 31% of 12th graders reported using marijuana.
-  The increase in vaping in the United States has masked the trends of marijuana use among youth.
-  Where researchers found that while overall marijuana use decreased, vaping and edible [marijuana] use increased.
-  Edible marijuana use among 12th grade students in the United States increased from 26% in 2015 to 34% in 2018.

Sources: <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/what-scope-marijuana-use-in-united-states>

Sources: <https://nida.nih.gov/news-events/science-highlight/marijuana-vaping-edible-use-increasing-among-high-school-seniors>

First Steps

It can be overwhelming to figure out how to start a serious conversation with your teen about substance use. But it doesn't have to be. You know your teen better than anyone, and are one of the strongest influences in their life. Try to get in the right mindset and focus on positive communication. Here's how.

1

Find a comfortable setting

Instead of announcing a sit-down family meeting at 7 p.m. sharp, which will likely be met with resistance and hesitation, try for a more relaxed approach. Consider taking a walk or incorporating the conversation in a normal family routine.

2

Keep an open mind

If your teen feels judged or criticized, they are less likely to be receptive to your message. We recommend that you remain objective and open as you go into the conversation. Try to avoid judgment and condemnation.

3

Put yourself in their shoes

Consider how you felt at your teen's age. It's a formative time, complete with many stressors unique to these years. Lead with compassion and empathy, and speak to your teen the way you'd like to be spoken to.

Starting the Conversation

When it comes to teens, parents are powerful. Research has shown that when parents talk to teens about the dangers of substance use, they are 50% less likely to use compared to those who do not receive these critical messages at home (NCADD, 2015). Here's how you can start the conversation.

1

Boundaries & body language

Set clear boundaries in a direct and honest way, and identify specific consequences of breaking these boundaries. Explain your reasoning as you communicate these. But be mindful of your body language, avoid finger-pointing, crossed arms, and other negative signals.

2

Stay positive & calm

Try to avoid scare tactics and shaming, as these can have negative effects on future conversations. Instead, stay open, attentive, and understanding, engaging your teen in an open dialogue that takes their perspective and feelings into consideration.

3

Prepare your teen

It's no secret, peer pressure is very real. The best way to combat it is to prepare your teen for these tough moments. Consider brainstorming ways to turn down substances with your teen. Instead of telling them what to do or say, help them come up with their own reasons.

Conversation Starters

- If you were with friends who were vaping, drinking, or using drugs, how would you feel? How would you handle it?
- Besides family members, who do you feel most comfortable talking to about substances?
- I want us to be able to discuss topics openly, because I love you and want to support you during the years when you're faced with a lot of difficult choices.

Following Up

The conversation doesn't have to end here. Continue to encourage and foster a healthy dialogue surrounding substance use with your teen. Maintain a position of objectivity and openness to show your teen that you are their greatest resource. Below are some tips to continue the conversation.

1

Look for teachable moments

Use current events, TV shows, movies, social media, real-life situations, and more to emphasize the importance of avoiding harmful substances and reopen the prevention conversation.

2

Maintain open communication

Use positive communication to keep the conversation between you and your teen open and honest. Let your teen know you hear them and acknowledge their feelings.

3

Keep the conversation going

Check-in with your teen periodically to see how they're doing. Offset any feelings of insecurity and doubt with positive comments about their character. Remind them that you are always there for them, no strings attached.

Other Resources

Looking for additional resources? We've listed a few helpful items below. You can also reach out to Arbor Place with any questions at info@arborplaceinc.org

- [Learn More About Arbor Place](#)
- [Family Support & Education Program](#)
- [Alcohol Resources](#)
- [Marijuana Resources](#)
- [Vaping & Tobacco Resources](#)
- [Prevention Resource Guide](#)
- [Tips for Parents on Underage Drinking](#)
- [Parenting to Prevent Childhood Alcohol Use](#)
- [The Risks of e-Cigarettes for Kids, Teens & Young Adults](#)



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Get confidential help today. We are only a call away.

715.235.4537