



# FAMILY CHECKUP

**POSITIVE PARENTING  
PREVENTS DRUG ABUSE**



National Institute  
on Drug Abuse





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# Introduction

## Could your kids be at risk for substance abuse?

Families strive to find the best ways to raise their children to live happy, healthy, and productive lives. Parents are often concerned about whether their children will start or are already using drugs such as tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and others, including the abuse of prescription drugs. Research supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has shown the important role that parents play in preventing their children from starting to use drugs.

This publication presents evidence-based information developed by the Child and Family Center at the University of Oregon. It highlights parenting skills that are important in preventing the initiation and progression of drug use among youth. This publication also provides access to video clips that can help you practice positive parenting skills.

**Families strive to find the  
best ways to raise their  
children to live happy, healthy,  
and productive lives.**

## Communication

*Good communication* between parents and children is the foundation of strong family relationships. Developing good communication skills helps parents catch problems early, support positive behavior, and stay aware of what is happening in their children's lives.

### Before you begin:

- Be sure it's a good time to talk and you can focus one hundred percent on communicating with your child.
- Have a plan.
- Gather your thoughts before you approach your child.
- Be calm and patient.
- Limit distractions.

### Key communication skills include:

**Questioning**—The kind of information you receive depends a lot on how you ask the question.

- Show interest/concern. Don't blame/accuse. For example, instead of, "How do you get yourself into these situations?" say, "That sounds like a difficult situation. Were you confused?"
- Encourage problem-solving/ thinking. For example: Instead of, "What did you think was going to happen when you don't think?" say, "So, what do you think would have been a better way to handle that?"

### EXTRA TIPS

- Be present and tuned in.
- Show understanding.
- Listen with respect.
- Be interested.
- Avoid negative emotions.
- Give encouragement.

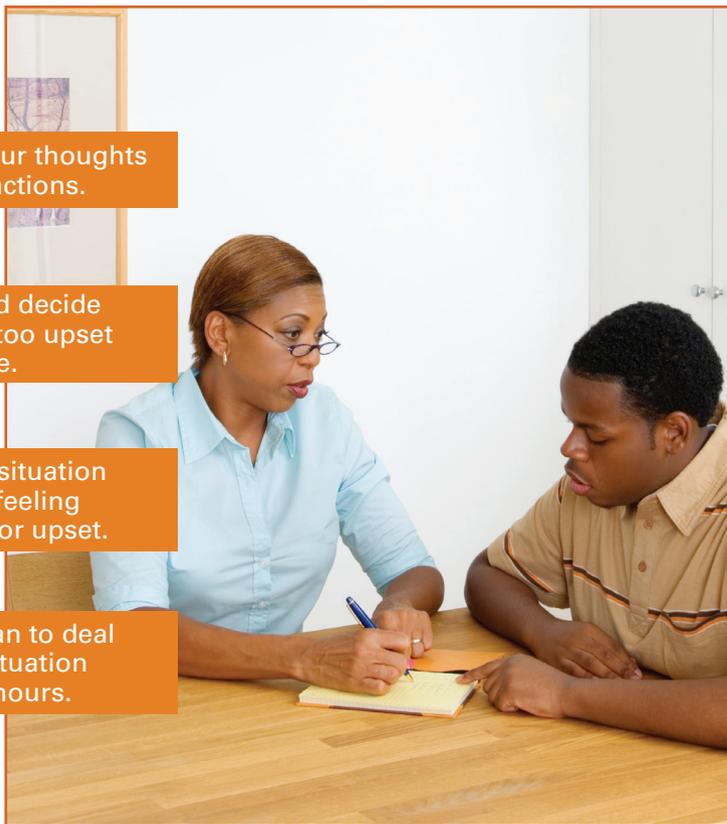
**Listening and observing** — Youth feel more comfortable bringing issues and situations to their parents when they know they will be listened to and not be accused.

**C** Control your thoughts and your actions.

**A** Assess and decide if you are too upset to continue.

**L** Leave the situation if you are feeling too angry or upset.

**M** Make a plan to deal with the situation within 24 hours.



*Jupiterimages/Getty Images*

### Reducing Emotion

Sometimes talking with children brings up strong feelings that interfere with clear thinking. Following the CALM steps can help a parent keep the conversation moving in the right direction.

### Videos

For videos that show examples of good communication, visit [www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-1-communication](http://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-1-communication).

# Encouragement

*Encouragement* is key to building confidence and a strong sense of self and helps parents to promote cooperation and reduce conflict. Many successful people remember the encouragement of a parent, teacher, or other adult. Consistent encouragement helps youth feel good about themselves and gives them confidence to:

- try new activities
- tackle difficult tasks
- develop new friendships
- explore their creativity

## **Encouragement promotes a strong sense of self because it sends three main messages to your child:**

**You can do it!** Youth believe they can do things if parents:

- help them break a problem down into smaller parts
- remind them of their strengths and past successes
- encourage them by sharing how they have dealt with challenges

**You have good ideas!** Youth believe they have good ideas if parents:

- ask them to share their opinions and feelings
- listen to what they have to say
- ask them for input concerning family plans and events
- ask them for ideas to solve family problems

**You are important!** Youth know they are important if parents:

- remember what they have told them
- make time for them each day
- attend school and extracurricular activities

- let them know that they are thinking about them when they can't be with them
- display things they have made and recognitions they receive from school or the community

### Practices That are Discouraging

- Being sarcastic or negative about a child's ability to be successful
- Comparing a child to brothers and sisters
- Taking over when a child's progress is slow
- Reminding a child of past failures

### Videos

For videos that show examples of encouragement, visit [www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-2-encouragement](http://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-2-encouragement).

### Examples of Encouraging Words

- "I know that wasn't easy."
- "I like the way you did that."
- "You did such an awesome job!"
- "I can tell you've been practicing."
- "Keep on trying."
- "It's great to see you working so hard!"
- "You are very good at that."
- "I'm so proud of you."
- "You are learning a lot."

# Negotiation

*Negotiating solutions* offers parents a way to work together to solve problems, make changes, promote and improve cooperation, and teach youth how to:

- focus on solutions rather than problems
- think through possible outcomes of behavior
- develop communication skills

## Set Up for Success

**When:** Select an unemotional or regularly scheduled time (not in the middle of a problem).

**Where:** Choose a neutral place with few distractions.

**How:**

- Choose problems that are small and specific!
- State the problem neutrally.
- Recognize the other person's positive behavior.
- Accept part of the responsibility for the problem.
- Restate what you hear, show understanding, and stop if you get too upset.

## The Steps to Problem-Solving

**Brainstorm — Open your mind to all ideas:**

- Try to come up with three ideas each.
- Any idea is good — even ones that seem silly.
- Take turns coming up with ideas.

**Evaluate your list of ideas:**

- Go through and list the pluses and minuses of each idea.

**Choose a solution:**

- Combine ideas if needed.
- All of you should agree on the chosen solution.

## Follow Up

- Check in with each other after you have tried your solution a couple of times to see how it is working.
- If it isn't working, go back to your list of ideas.
- If necessary, start over with some more brainstorming.

## Videos

For videos that show examples of negotiating solutions, visit [www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-3-negotiation](http://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-3-negotiation).



*Thinkstock Images/Getty Images*

## Problem-Solving Traps

- Don't try to solve hot issues.
- Don't blame the other person or put the other person down.
- Don't defend yourself—try to let it go.
- Don't make assumptions about another person's intentions.
- Don't bring up the past—avoid using words such as "always" and "never."
- Don't lecture—a simple statement will get your point across better.

## Setting Limits

*Setting limits* helps parents teach self-control and responsibility, show caring, and provide safe boundaries. It also provides youth with guidelines and teaches them the importance of following rules. This is a two-step process:

### Step 1: Setting Rules

- Make clear simple, specific rules.
- Make sure your child understands your rules.
- Have a list of consequences.
- Be ready to follow through.

### Step 2: Following Up

Research shows that parents are most effective in setting limits when they follow up right away. Youth are more likely to follow rules if they know parents are checking up on them and will enforce the consequences consistently.

- Give a consequence when rules are broken.
- Offer encouragement when rules are followed.

### Extra Tips

- State the limit and the consequence clearly.
- Catch the problem early.
- Avoid arguments and threats.
- Remember to use a firm and calm tone of voice.
- Follow through each time a limit is stretched or a rule is broken.
- Offer encouragement each time a rule is followed.

**Setting limits helps  
parents teach self-control  
and responsibility.**

**Testing limits** is a natural part of growing up, but it presents a special challenge for parents. Often our first reactions may come from fear for our child's safety, or anger at being disobeyed. The **SANE** guidelines can help parents establish appropriate consequences when youth break rules.

**S**

Small consequences are better

**A**

Avoid consequences that punish you

**N**

Nonabusive responses

**E**

Effective consequences (are under your control and non-rewarding to your child)



*Alon Brik/Shutterstock*

Youth may get angry, act out, or become isolated when parents enforce consequences. Your child is testing you and your limits. Don't react. Be consistent with your rules.

### Videos

For videos that show examples of setting limits, visit [www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-4-setting-limits](http://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-4-setting-limits).

# Supervision

*Supervision* is the centerpiece of effective parenting during childhood. When youth begin to spend more and more time away from home, monitoring their behavior and whereabouts is challenging. Supervision helps parents recognize developing problems, promote safety, and stay involved.

## The 4 Cs of supervision can help you with this difficult task:

**Clear Rules** — Have a few non-negotiable rules about your child's behavior and state them clearly! For example:

- "Give me a phone number for any place you will be."
- "I need 24-hour notice for spending the night or going to a party, dance, or other special event." (This gives you time to check out the event.)
- "No friends at the house when I am not at home."

**Communication** — Regular communication with other parents and teachers:

- keeps you involved in your child's activities
- creates resources to deal with problems and builds a strong safety network for your child
- informs you of dangerous places or people

**Checking Up** — This lets your child know that you care about his or her safety and that your rules are important. This is hard for some of us because we want to trust our children and they may resist our efforts.

- When your child gives you the phone number of a friend, call it and talk to the parent.
- Meet all the parents of your child's friends to make sure new situations are safe and supervised.
- Find out about the parties and special events your child wants to attend to make sure that responsible adults will be supervising.

**Consistency** — Supervision is most effective when parents set clear limits and follow through with consequences for misbehavior. Also, be consistent with giving praise and incentives when a rule is followed.

### How do you supervise when you are not at home?

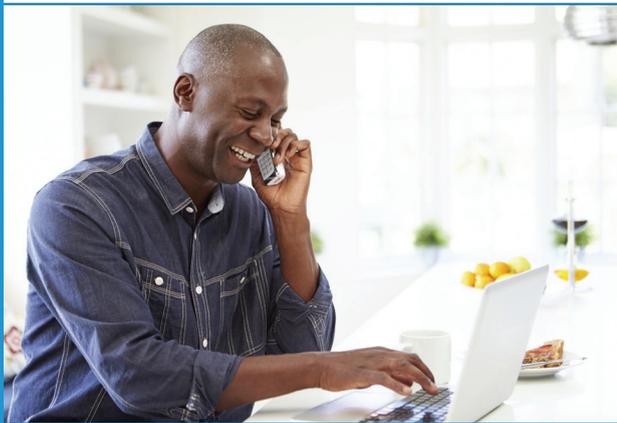
- Know your child’s schedule.
- Call your child at varying times.
- Have your child check in with you or other caregivers when he or she reaches home.
- Have your child check in when he or she reaches his or her destination.
- Surprise your child with a random visit or call.
- Remain in communication with adults who interact with your child.

### Videos

For videos that show examples of supervision, visit [www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-5-supervision](http://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup/question-5-supervision).

### Extra Tips

- Stay involved.
- Spend time listening to your child.
- Know who your child’s friends are and watch your child interact with them and others.
- Talk to the parent(s) of your child’s friends.



*monkeybusinessimages/Getty Images*

## Knowing Your Child's Friends

*Childhood is a period of major growth and change.* Youth tend to be uncertain about themselves and how they “fit in,” and at times they can feel overwhelmed by a need to please and impress their friends. These feelings can leave children open to peer pressure. Knowing your child's friends and peers helps parents improve communication, reduce conflict, and teach responsibility.

**You can help your child and increase your influence by:**

**knowing your child's friends in the neighborhood and at school:**

- Communicate with friends and their parents whenever possible.
- Go to school—observe school behavior and who your child spends time with.
- Observe behaviors, speech, and attitude and acknowledge and encourage positive behavior.

**staying involved in your child's activities:**

- Help your child understand his or her feelings.
- Discuss your child's new ideas.
- Be responsible for sex and drug information.
- Share your values and beliefs; it gives your child a base to work from.

### EXTRA TIPS

- Keep lines of communication open.
- Be patient and observe; don't react—it may pass.

**talking to your child when a concern comes up, such as:**

- spending time with friends you don't know
- changes in speech and attitude
- changes in schoolwork
- lying and sneaking around

## Peer Influence

Youth do not always make wise choices in picking friends. Help them see what qualities they should value in friends — such as honesty, school involvement, and respect.

To decrease negative peer influence, spend time together and try these ideas:

- Play board/outdoor games.
- Read with your child or tell family stories.
- Encourage your child's interests (such as drawing, scientific curiosity, music, and cooking).
- Include your child in social/cultural events in the community.
- Include your child's friends in family activities.

**Help children see what qualities they should value in friends—such as honesty, school involvement, and respect.**







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