



FROM SUSPICION TO SUPPORT: ADVISE ON APPROACHING YOUR CHILD

Drug use among teenagers and young adults is a big deal and a widespread concern in today's society. Buying drugs these days is like buying candy for a kid, it is available just about everywhere. You can find drugs in all sorts of places, not just in sketchy areas or under bridges at the railway station. Even places like pawn shops, dry cleaners, cinemas, shopping centres, libraries, night clubs, and pubs are involved in this drug scene. The most frightening is that drugs are also available at many schools, colleges and even churches! Our youth is surrounded by drugs. If you notice that your child starts hanging out in weird new places they've never been to before, show significant changes in his/her behaviour, or develop unusual new habits, you might want to check it out and investigate it a little bit just to be on the safe side. Remember not all signs are indicators of drug use, but when a red flag is raised, it is time to pay attention.

Those simple days of drug classifications and to "JUST SAY NO" to marijuana and cocaine does not cover the boundless range of substances available today. Drug trend are constantly evolving, with new substances and dangerous concoctions hitting the streets. We have traditional drugs to synthetic alternatives, which can be challenging to keep up with insofar as what your child may be exposed to. Staying informed about new drug trends, is crucial in order to help your child in this ever-changing world.

When addressing your child's possible drug use, open and honest communication is vital. Now this might sound said easier than done, but be wise and try to create an atmosphere of trust where your child will feel comfortable discussing their experiences and concerns with you. Encourage them to share their thoughts without fear of judgment (even if you feel like killing them in that moment) you have to control your emotions, and be ready to listen without jumping to conclusions. Strong foundations regarding communication may increase the chances of identifying and addressing any potential drug use.

IMPORTANT! Do not fall into the trap of questioning yourself as to where I went wrong. Many parents' first thoughts are to find blame within themselves, questioning themselves as where they went wrong. The truth is that you have done nothing wrong, but we who dabble or experiment with drugs tend to hang out with the wrong crowd or make our own bad choices.

Now that you know that you are not at fault for your child's suspected drug use, choose a time when both of you and your child can have an uninterrupted conversation, and avoid accusations. Instead, express your concerns, ask open-ended questions, and encourage them to share their perspective. Remember, the goal is to understand and support your child, rather than simply lecturing or shaming them. On the flip side, you can expect to get a lot of push back from your child such as: being angry at you because you went through their stuff, (don't let that phase you, if you live under someone's roof, you also live under their rules) they will pass the buck telling you that you smoke or have an occasional drink (don't let that throw you, go straight back to their problem). They might call you a hypocrite and tell you that you are wrong and that they never did drugs. In that case make sure that you have gathered some evidence or warning signs regarding their strange behaviour and go back to that. Let them know that you are concerned about their health and safety and that it is your job as a parent to step in, when you suspect that they are unsafe. If you do in fact have a recovery problem let them know that you love them too much for them to go down the same road and to experience the pain you had experienced. When you have this talk, do whatever you can to keep calm and collected, because if you scream, the conversation will just end badly. However, be direct but try not to show any judgement. If you can pull that off, your child may feel safe enough to open up. Listen without interrupting and if your child tells you a story, let them know that you believe them, but have to follow up their claims. Whatever you do, do not have a conversation with your child when they are under the influence.

Should your child admit to trying substances, the following question you need to ask them is WHY? This may indicate the area as to what the child needs to address. It may be curiosity, peer pressure, anxiety, boredom etc. A lot of times parents have breakthroughs when they talk to their children about their own mistakes and may be a valuable tool to use to relate to your child.

Academic and social performance can be an indicator of drug use. Children can be cruel to one another, or sometimes bullied at school. Whatever the reason is for your child's poor performance, you have to help find the root cause.

As a parent you need to be skilled with active listening techniques. That involves giving your full attention to your child, be sensitive and showing empathy when they share their thoughts and feelings. However to be a skilled listener you will also have to set clear boundaries and expectations while acknowledging that mistakes happen and that you are there to support and guide them through difficult situations. Transparency between the parent and child is essential to building a solid trusting relationship.

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, your child may still struggle with drug use. In this case it will be crucial to seek professional help. Professional intervention can provide the guidance and support necessary to address underlying issues and develop effective strategies for recovery. Remember, as a parent, it's okay to ask for help and involve trained people. **(See Addiction Treatments Available document for information on types of therapy counseling, programmes etc.)**

One effective way to support your child and steer them away from drug use is by encouraging them to participate in healthy alternative activities. Engage in conversations about their interests and passions, and help them explore hobbies or join clubs and sports teams. By keeping their minds and bodies occupied, they will be less likely to turn to drugs for stimulation or escape.

You will need a combination of understanding and discipline to support your child who is involved in substance abuse. It is vital to strike a balance between being a friend and being a parent. You can offer

your support and reassure the child that you will help him, but in the same time you and your child need to draw up some kind of contract with clear rules and boundaries, for example; no drugs or drug paraphernalia in your house, obey curfews, taking regular drug tests at any given time. If any of these agreements or boundaries are broken or overstepped, you have to stick to your gun and follow through with the consequences you decided on. These consequences may be that your child will go to rehab, attend Sober meetings/counseling session, car keys and privileges are taken away, not allowed to handle cash. More importantly, **NEVER** make any excuses for the child for missing school, a test, exam or work. Let him take the tumble and feel the consequences of his/her actions. This will help you not to become an enabler and sometimes tough love might be the only resort to help your child walk away from addiction.

As a parent, you have to educate yourself about the risks and dangers of drug use. Stay informed about the latest substances and trends. Each drug has its own set of risks and effects. The more you know, the better equipped you will be to understand what your child may be going through and how to support them effectively. This knowledge will enable you to have informed conversations and address any concerns you may have.

Remember that you are not alone. Your community may have resources and support groups to help you. Google to see if there are places where you can connect with groups where other parents are going through similar experiences that can be incredibly helpful.

Remember, the reality is that your child can relapse. This can be very demoralizing. However, instead of viewing relapse as a failure, see it as an opportunity for growth and learning. We can make a mistake once, but when we learned from our experience there should be no room to make the same mistake again. Setbacks may happen, but it is more important to help your child get back on track as fast as possible and you don't want him/her to fall into shame that can be a trigger to continue bingeing.

You need to arm yourself with coping mechanisms. Setbacks and challenges can be emotionally draining for you and your child. You need to find tools to manage stress and anxiety. (Go through the Support Group Session, and see which lessons might be applicable to you).