

# WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR 16-18 YEAR OLD

**Conversations are one of the most powerful tools parents can use to connect with — and protect — their kids.** But, when tackling some of life's tougher topics, especially those about drugs and alcohol, just figuring out what to say can be a challenge. The following scripts will help you get conversations going with your 16 to 18 year old.

## **Scenario**

Your teen is starting high school — and you want to remind him that he doesn't have to give in to peer pressure to drink or use drugs.

## **What to Say**

You must be so excited about starting high school... it's going to be a ton of fun, and we want you to have a great time. But we also know there's going to be some pressure to start drinking, smoking pot or taking other drugs. A lot of people feel like this is just what high school kids do. But not all high school kids drink! Many don't, which means it won't make you weird to choose not to drink, either. You can still have a lot of fun if you don't drink.

You'll have a lot of decisions to make about what you want to do in high school and you might even make some mistakes. Just know that you can talk to us about anything – even if you DO make a mistake. We won't freak out. We want you to count on us to help you make smart decisions and stay safe, okay?

## **Scenario**

Every time you ask your teen how his day was, you get a mumbled, "Whatever, it was okay," in return.

## **What to Say**

Skip asking general questions like "How's school?" every day. Instead, ask more specific questions on topics that interest both you and your teen ("Tell me about the pep rally yesterday." "Are there a lot of cliques in your school?" "Fill me in on your Chemistry lab test.") You can also use humor and even some gentle sarcasm to get the conversation flowing. Try, "Oh, what a joy it is to live with a brooding teenager!" to make your child laugh and start opening up a bit.

## **Scenario**

Your high-schooler comes home smelling of alcohol or cigarette smoke for the first time.

## **What to Say**

"The response should be measured, quiet and serious—not yelling, shouting or overly emotional," says parenting expert Marybeth Hicks. "Your child should realize that this isn't just a frustrating moment like when he doesn't do a chore you asked for; it's very big, very important, and very serious."

Say, "I'm really upset that you're smoking/drinking. I need to get a handle on how often this has been happening and what your experiences have been so far. I get that you're worried about being in trouble, but the

worst part of that moment is over – I know that you’re experimenting. The best thing you can do now is really be straight with me, so for starters, tell me about what happened tonight...”

### Scenario

Your teen has started to hang out with kids you don’t know — and dropped his old friends.

### What to Say

It seems like you are hanging with a different crowd than you have in the past. Is something up with your usual friends? Is there a problem with [old friends’ names] or are you just branching out and meeting some new kids? Tell me about your new friends. What are they like? What do they like to do? What do you like about them?

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