

What to say to your 9 -12 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 9-to-12-year-old child.

Scenario

Your child is just starting middle school and you know that eventually, he will be offered drugs and alcohol.

What to Say

There are a lot of changes ahead of you in middle school. I know we talked about drinking and drugs when you were younger, but now is when they’re probably going to be an issue. I’m guessing you’ll at least hear about kids who are experimenting, if not find yourself some place where kids are doing stuff that is risky. I just want you to remember that I’m here for you and the best thing you can do is just talk to me about the stuff you hear or see. Don’t think there’s anything I can’t handle or that you can’t talk about with me, okay?

Scenario

You find out that kids are selling prescription drugs at your child’s school. Your child hasn’t mentioned it and you want to get the conversation about it started.

What to Say

Hey, you probably know that parents talk to each other and find things out about what’s going on at school... I heard there are kids selling pills – prescriptions that either they are taking or someone in their family takes. Have you heard about kids doing this?

Scenario

Your child’s favorite celebrity—the one he or she really looks up to—has been named in a drug scandal.

What to Say

I think it must be really difficult to live a celebrity life and stay away from that stuff. Being in the public eye puts a ton of pressure on people, and many turn to drugs because they think drugs will relieve that stress. But a lot of famous people manage to stay clean – like [name others who don’t do drugs] – and hopefully this incident is going to help [name of celebrity] straighten out his life. Of course, people make mistakes – the real measure of a person is how accountable he is when he messes up. It will be interesting to see how he turns out, won’t it?

The thing is, when a person uses drugs and alcohol—especially a kid because he’s still growing—it changes how his brain works and makes him do really stupid things. Most people who use drugs and alcohol need a lot of help to get better. I hope [name] has a good doctor and friends and family members to help him/her.

Scenario Your child tells you he was offered prescription drugs by a classmate — but said no.

What to Say After praising your child for making a good choice and for telling you about it, let him know that in the future, he can always blame you to get out of a bad situation. Say, “If you’re ever offered drugs at school, tell that person, ‘My mother would kill me if I took that and then she wouldn’t let me play baseball.’”

Scenario Your child comes home reeking of cigarette smoke.

What to Say I know you’re curious and you wanted to see what smoking was like, but as you can see, it’s pretty disgusting and it probably made you cough and gag a lot. Your clothes and your breath and your hair all stink. Is that how you want to be known? As the kid who stinks?

Scenario

One in six teens in America has tried huffing — inhaling the fumes from everyday items like nail polish remover, hair spray, and cooking spray. It’s probably been a while since you’ve talked to your child about the dangers of the products under the kitchen sink — but it’s important to reiterate the warning.

What to Say I know it’s been a while since I talked to you about the dangers of cleaning products and that they should only be used for cleaning. But I’ve heard that some kids are using them to get high. I just want to let you know that even if your friends say, “Hey, we can buy this stuff at the supermarket so it’s totally okay to sniff it,” it’s not. Inhaling fumes from cleaners or products like cooking spray and nail polish remover is as dangerous as doing all the drugs we’ve talked about, like marijuana.

Now, let’s talk about ways you can get out of the situation if that happens. What do you think you should say? Remember, you can always blame me and say, “My mom would kill me if I tried that!”