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Keeping Your Kids Tobacco-free

- [What parents need to know about tobacco](#)
- [Keep your kids from starting](#)
- [Help your child quit](#)
- [Programs and resources](#)

What parents need to know about tobacco

Using tobacco in any form is not safe.

Most people who use tobacco regularly start before they turn 18. Youth report using different kinds of tobacco products, including cigarettes, e-cigarettes (vapes), cigarillos, hookah, smokeless (chewing or dipping) tobacco or snuff, and a variety of new and emerging products.

Kids need to know the dangers of using any type of tobacco now and in the future. Nicotine exposure during youth can harm the developing adolescent brain and can lead to a lifetime of nicotine addiction and tobacco use. Nicotine exposure can also prime the adolescent brain for addiction to other drugs.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States. Preventing the use of tobacco products in youth is a very important step to help keep kids healthy and to help stop the tobacco epidemic. And if they've already started using cigarettes, e-cigarettes, or other forms of tobacco, helping them quit is critical to protecting their health now and later in life.

Keep your kids from starting

Research has shown that teens whose parents often talk with them about the

dangers of tobacco use are about half as likely to smoke as those who don't have these discussions with their parents. This holds true whether or not the parents use tobacco themselves.

Here are some tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for parents to help keep kids tobacco-free:

- Remember that despite the impact of movies, music, the internet, social media, and peers, **parents can be the greatest influence in their kids' lives.**
- Start talking about tobacco use when your children are 5 or 6 years old and continue through their high school years and into college or as they start their careers. In many cases, kids start using tobacco products by age 11. And many are addicted by age 14.
- If loved ones have or died from tobacco-related illnesses, let your kids know.
- Let kids know that using tobacco puts a strain on the heart, damages the lungs, and can cause many other health problems, including cancer. Smoke from cigarettes and vapors from e-cigarettes can be also harmful to people who don't use tobacco products but are exposed to them.
- Talk about the harmful effects of nicotine. Nicotine is found in cigarettes, cigars, hookahs, smokeless tobacco, and most e-cigarettes. Nicotine is very addictive. There is evidence that it harms the brain development of teenagers. It can also cause premature births and low birthweight babies if tobacco is used during pregnancy.
- Also talk about what using tobacco can do to the way a person looks and smells: smoking and vaping makes hair and clothes stink, causes bad breath, and can stain teeth and fingernails. Spit and smokeless tobacco can cause bad breath, stained teeth, tooth decay, tooth loss, and bone loss in the jaw.
- Include the actual expense of tobacco use in your talks, and how much money they can save or use on other things instead of tobacco products.
- Know if your kids' friends smoke, vape, or use dip or chew. Talk about ways to say "no" to all forms of tobacco.
- Talk to your kids about the false glamorization of tobacco in the media, such as in ads, movies, social media, and magazines.

The CDC provides data, reports, and other resources on youth tobacco prevention as well as information about [youth e-cigarette use](#)¹.

The Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids has [helpful information for schools](#)² to help kids stay tobacco free.

Help your child quit

If your child has already started using any form of tobacco, including e-cigarettes, try these tips to help them quit:

- Find out why your child is smoking or using other forms of tobacco. Ask questions to find out what kind they are using.
- Try to avoid threats and ultimatums. Show interest. Find out what changes can be made in their life to help your child quit using tobacco.
- If you use tobacco yourself, try to quit. If you did smoke or use other forms of tobacco and have already quit, tell your child what it was like for you. Personalize the little problems around tobacco use and the big challenge of quitting. Teens and pre-teens often believe they can quit whenever they want, but research shows most teens never do. Try to share these facts with them in a non-threatening way.
- Support your child if they're trying to quit. Both you and your child might need to prepare for the mood swings and crankiness that can come with nicotine withdrawal.

Programs and resources

There are programs and resources that have been developed specifically for teenagers and young adults to help them quit. They include:

- [CDC³: Hub for information on youth cessation⁴](#)
- [Truth Initiative: Program to help youth quit tobacco products⁵](#)
- [Truth Initiative: Resources for parents to help youth quit vaping⁶](#)
- [American Lung Association: Tips and information to help kids quit tobacco⁷](#)
- [Smokefree.gov: Hub to help youth quit tobacco⁸](#)
- [M⁹D Anderson Cancer Center: Free bilingual online program to help students become tobacco-free¹⁰](#)

See [Health Risks of Using Tobacco Products¹¹](#) or [E-cigarettes and Vaping¹²](#) learn more about the safety and use of tobacco and e-cigarettes.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/youth.html
2. www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0153.pdf
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Written by

[The American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team](#)

Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as editors and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

This content has been developed by the American Cancer Society in collaboration with the [Smoking Cessation Leadership Center](#)¹³ to help people who want to learn about quitting tobacco.

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