

Avoiding Risky Behaviors

The high school years give you a glimpse of the young adult your child is becoming. They also bring new challenges in keeping him safe. Here are ways you can help your teen avoid dangerous substances, be a safe driver, and have healthy dating relationships.



Prevent drug use

One of the best ways to prevent your children from experimenting with alcohol and other drugs is to talk about the subject.



■ **Risks.** Ask what they know about drugs, and make it clear you don't want them trying any. Point out that using drugs at this age is especially harmful because their brains and bodies are still growing.

Also, focus on risks that will matter to *them*. For example, your teen could be kicked off a sports team or get a bad reputation.

■ **Parties.** If there's a party, check with the parents ahead of time. Make sure the teens will be supervised and that alcohol won't be served. If you're uncertain whether a party will be safe, say no and offer an alternative, like letting your child have friends over.

■ **Saying no.** Go over ways to turn down alcohol or drugs. Your teen might simply say "No, thanks," use humor ("I don't look good in handcuffs"), or use you or school as an excuse ("My parents would ground me forever" or "I have a paper to write").

Be aware of drugs

Different drugs are popular in different places. To learn what's common where you live, ask local police or school administrators what they see. Watch for substances like these.

■ **Alcohol.** People who start drinking at a younger age have a greater chance of becoming addicted. Keep an eye on alcohol if you have it at home (for instance, check the levels in liquor bottles). Better yet, lock it up.

■ **Nicotine.** While smoking is on the decline among young people, e-cigarettes are gaining popularity. And using e-cigs to inhale nicotine-based vapor can get young people hooked. Let your high schooler know these devices are off-limits.

■ **Marijuana.** Surveys show that adolescents don't see as much of a risk in using "weed" as they used to. Explain to your teen that marijuana carries special risks for adolescent brains. For instance, it's been shown to damage attention and memory, making it harder to learn.

■ **Prescription drugs.** Teenagers might use medications like painkillers, tranquilizers, antidepressants, sleeping pills, or stimulants (like ADHD medicines), thinking they aren't as dangerous as "regular" drugs. Tell your child it's illegal to use someone else's prescription and that doing so can be addictive and deadly. Get rid of unused medications, or lock them in cabinets.



■ **Heroin.** Adolescents who become addicted to prescription drugs may turn to heroin because it's cheaper and easier to get. Explain to your teen that using heroin is extremely dangerous, and it's a vicious cycle. Withdrawal symptoms are severe, leading the user to seek more heroin to feel better.

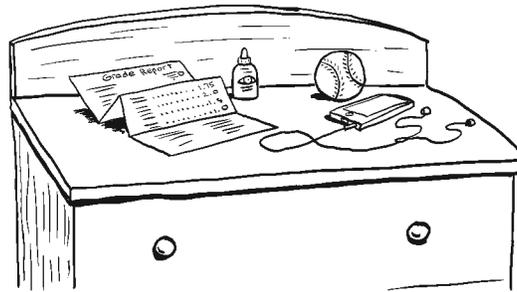
Note: Become familiar with drug-related slang by checking sites like noslang.com/drugs. Keep an eye on your child's texts and social media posts for drug terms.

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Drugs: Warning signs

Symptoms vary by drug, but below are common ones. Since some are typical teen behaviors, you'll need to consider whether they continue longer than normal or whether two or more are happening together. Look for:

- Withdrawing from family, friends, and activities
- Significant drop in grades
- Unusual tiredness or energy
- Unexplained nausea or vomiting
- Red or flushed face
- Skin irritations or bruises
- Frequent nosebleeds or runny nose
- Excessive thirst
- Increased use of eyedrops (to reduce redness)



- Sudden use of air fresheners, scented candles, or incense (to cover up drug, cigarette, or alcohol odor)
- Unusual activity regarding money (frequently asking for money, selling personal belongings, stealing)

If you suspect your child is using drugs, check with teachers to see if they've noticed anything unusual. Ask your teen directly, and let her know you care about her safety and want to get her help. If she denies using them but symptoms continue, take her to the doctor for a medical opinion. You can also call the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids helpline (855-378-4373).

Encourage safe driving

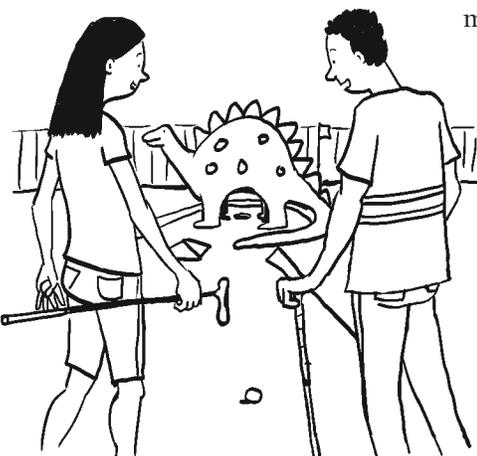
Teen drivers are more likely than other age groups to get into accidents. Make your child safer behind the wheel by practicing in different conditions at different times (rain, snow, dawn, dusk) and in different places (side streets, highways, parking lots). Point out strategies that work for each situation. For instance, bright sun can blind your sight temporarily, so wear sunglasses and keep the visor down. In rain or snow, drive more slowly and leave extra room between cars.

Start your teen out slowly once he gets his license. You might allow him to drive only to school and work at first. Over time, perhaps he could drive farther away. Also, even if state law doesn't limit passengers for teen drivers, consider not allowing friends in the car—they can be distracting and may encourage showing off.

Let your teenager know that driving provides freedom but comes with responsibility. That means following ground rules like wearing a seat belt on every trip (no matter how short), never texting while driving, and obeying the speed limit and other laws. Consider putting teeth into those responsibilities, too. You might require your teen to pay for any tickets he gets, damage from any accidents he causes, and additional insurance costs.



Promote healthy dating



Your high schooler may or may not be dating yet—either way, talk about healthy relationships. Discuss how one should be treated and should treat a partner. For instance, partners should respect each other and give

each other time with family and friends. They should also share decision making or be willing to compromise. If partners try to change each other, limit one another's time for outside interests, or insist on making all the decisions, the relationship is out of balance.

Sadly, teen dating violence is all too common. Explain that under no circumstances should your child or a date hurt each other physically, call one another names, or force sexual activity. Let your teens know they can come to you or another trusted adult if they ever think a partner is abusive.

Talking to your teenagers about sex will also help protect them. Explain your views, and listen to theirs. Tell them you're willing to answer questions and that you plan to bring up the subject again.

High School Years