

PREVENT SUBSTANCE USE AT EVERY AGE

You as a parent or someone in a parenting role can be the strongest intervention for your child against misusing substances later in life.

Taking an active role in your child's development, even from the earliest ages, supports their growth of social and emotional skills, which are skills that will help them be able to:

- Manage emotions
- Self-regulate
- Make good decisions
- Get along with others
- Communicate effectively

To prevent future substance use, you can support healthy development based on your child's age. Knowing how to support their growth at specific ages is key.

Ages 0-4

- Create safe, stable, and nurturing relationships by responding to and meeting your child's physical, social, and emotional needs.
- Make time to hold your child – they need physical contact. Rocking and reading before bed are great opportunities for connection.
- Talk about the importance of taking care of your bodies (eating healthy, brushing teeth, exercising, bathing, etc.).

Ages 5-10

- Social development is an important focus as they learn new skills, try new activities, and spend more time with friends.
- Most of their learning will occur through interactions with others, and their developing brains need nurturing and predictability to avoid stress responses.
- Modeling positive behavior for your child is critical in this stage.
- If they ask, answer questions about drug and alcohol use.



Ages 11-14

- Your child is experiencing rapid physical and mental growth, and hormonal imbalances may cause emotional distress.
- Helping your child acknowledge and navigate the physical/ bodily changes they are experiencing as well as manage their big emotions will assist them with insecurities they may be feeling.
- Have conversations with your child about substances. Ask their opinions and be open to their views. Model good listening skills as this will increase the likelihood that they will talk to you when they have concerns.
- Ask about and get to know their friends.

Ages 15-19

- The influence of your child's peers is strong, so they need to know how to recognize and manage peer pressure. Your guidance will be their gauge of what is acceptable.
- Take an active role in their lives so that you are involved in conversations about their important life decisions like drinking alcohol and other high-risk behaviors.
- Talk openly about drugs and alcohol and the reality of peer pressure.
- Know their friends and their friends' parents.
- Affirm any positive behavior or decision you see them make – your attention and affirmation is still their sweetest reward.

All Ages

- Store alcohol out of reach
- Do not over-consume alcohol in front of them
- Do not lie about your own use
- Do not host parties or buy alcohol for your child and their friends
- Be aware of how alcohol affects children differently than adults

Guiding and supporting your child in each stage of development requires that you adapt your skills and responses to meet the changing needs of your child.

**Learn about
this and more at
ParentingMontana.org.**



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