

Talking to 6-10 Year Olds About Healthy Choices



KEY FOCUS AT THIS AGE:

Introducing substances, responding to questions & practicing safe decision-making

At this age, kids may notice smoking, drinking, or vaping in public, on TV, or online. They're still deeply influenced by caregivers and are forming ideas about what's healthy and safe. This is a great time to introduce clear, simple messages about substances and encourage open conversation.

Key messages to share

"Some things – like cigarettes or alcohol – can hurt our bodies, especially when we're young."

Help them understand that substances can make people sick and aren't meant for growing bodies.

"Just because you see someone doing something doesn't mean it's safe or healthy."

Explain that people make different choices, and not all of them are good for us.

"If you're ever not sure what something is, you can always ask me or another trusted adult." Encourage them to ask questions freely without fear of getting in trouble.

"People sometimes make unhealthy choices, but we can choose what's best for us." Let them know they have the power to choose – and practice doing so in safe ways.

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"Addiction is a disease that makes it very difficult to stop using something. The substance tricks your brain and body into telling you they need it, even though it's actually hurting you or making you sick." Explaining addiction can help them understand why a loved one might use substances in a harmful way (if applicable), as well as how difficult it can sometimes be to quit after starting use.



How to talk about substances in a natural way

When watching TV/movies: "Why do you think that character is smoking?"

Do you think it's a healthy choice?"

If they ask about someone vaping or drinking: "Some adults make those choices, but they're not healthy – especially for kids. What questions do you have?"

If they see a discarded vape or cigarette: "Let's talk about why we don't touch things like that. What would you do if you found something and weren't sure what it was?"

When playing games or role-playing: "What would you say if someone offered you something you weren't sure about?"

They ask about your or a family member's safe, moderate alcohol or cannabis consumption: "Every body is different. Some choices that might be safe for one person are not safe for someone else. As an adult, my body and brain have stopped growing and a small amount of substances is safe for me. No amount of substances is safe for kids."

They ask about you or a family member's safe prescription drug use: "Every body is different. My doctor prescribed me medication to help my body, but the same medication would hurt yours."

Simple activities to reinforce the message

Sorting Game: Safe or Unsafe? Gather photos or draw pictures of everyday items like candy, medicine, fruit, soda, cigarettes, vitamins, etc. Let them sort into safe or unsafe for their body.

Healthy Me Checklist: Help them [keep track of the healthy choices](#) they make each day, like eating healthy foods and getting enough sleep, and how those choices make them feel.

Role Playing: Act out situations like being offered an unfamiliar drink or finding something at the park. Practice saying "no" or going to a grown-up for help. Here are some examples of how to say no.

Tips for parents & caregivers

- › **Stay curious.** Ask what they've seen or heard and how it made them feel.
- › **Keep the conversation open and ongoing,** not a one-time talk.
- › **Praise their questions** and efforts to understand.
- › Do your best to answer their questions, but **don't put pressure on yourself to have all the answers.** It's okay to admit you're unsure and say "let's look it up together."
- › **Be clear about expectations** while keeping the tone calm and supportive.
- › **Make your home a safe place for honest conversations** – even the awkward ones!

