

Tobacco & Kids

Children's addiction to nicotine from cigarette smoking, smokeless tobacco (chew) and cigars is a major public health problem. This sheet helps you understand the facts about smoking and young people, and how you can help prevent it.

TEEN SMOKING: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- Nearly 3 million U.S. teenagers smoke.
- Approximately 3,000 teenagers start smoking every day and one-third of them will die prematurely of a smoking-related disease (American Cancer Society).
- High school teens who smoke cigarettes are more likely to take risks such as ignoring seat belts, getting into physical fights, carrying weapons and having sex at an earlier age.
- Tobacco is considered to be a “gateway drug” which may lead to alcohol, marijuana and other illegal drug use.
- Tobacco use continues to be the most common cause of preventable disease and death in the United States.
- Smoking worsens existing medical problems, such as asthma, high blood pressure and diabetes.
- The earlier a person starts smoking, the greater the risk to his or her health and the harder it is to quit.

CHILDREN MOST AT RISK FOR TOBACCO USE:

- Have parents, siblings or friends who smoke.
- Exhibit characteristics like toughness and acting grown up.
- Deny the harmful effects of tobacco.
- Have fewer coping skills and smoke to alleviate stress.
- Suffer from poor self-esteem and depression.
- Perform poorly academically, especially girls.
- Are very influenced by advertisements that relate cigarette smoking to being thin, and/or suffer from eating disorders.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO PREVENT TOBACCO USE:

- Parents are role models. If you smoke, quit. If you have not quit, do not smoke in front of your children and tell them you regret that you started.
- Do not allow smoking in your home and strictly enforce your No Smoking rule.
- Ask about tobacco use by friends; compliment children who do not smoke.
- Do not allow your children to handle smoking materials.
- Do not allow your children to play with candy cigarettes. They are symbols for real cigarettes, and young children who play with them may be more likely to smoke.

Continued on next page



Tobacco & Kids

- Support school and community anti-smoking efforts and tell school officials you expect them to enforce No Smoking policies.
- Discuss with your children the false and misleading images used in advertising and movies which portray smoking as glamorous, healthy, sexy and mature.
- Emphasize the short-term negative effects such as bad breath, yellowed fingers, smelly clothes, shortness of breath and decreased performance in sports.
- Help children to say “No” to tobacco by role-playing situations in which tobacco is offered by peers.

If your child or teen has already begun to use tobacco, the following steps can help him or her to stop:

- Advise him/her to stop. Be non-confrontational, supportive and respectful.
- Assist his/her efforts to quit and express your desire to help.
- Provide educational materials.
- Help your youngster identify personally relevant reasons to quit.
- If you smoke, agree to quit with your child and negotiate a quit date.
- Enlist your child’s pediatrician or family physician to help your child stop smoking.

Content adapted and reprinted with permission from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry’s “Facts for Families.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The National Institute on Drug Abuse has facts for parents on their Web site at www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/Tobacco.html, as well as guides to help keep your child tobacco-free. There’s also a Web site at <http://smoking.drugabuse.gov/> with more information about smoking and tobacco use prevention.