

Helping Parents Understand Vaping

Monitoring Youth to Prevent Vaping

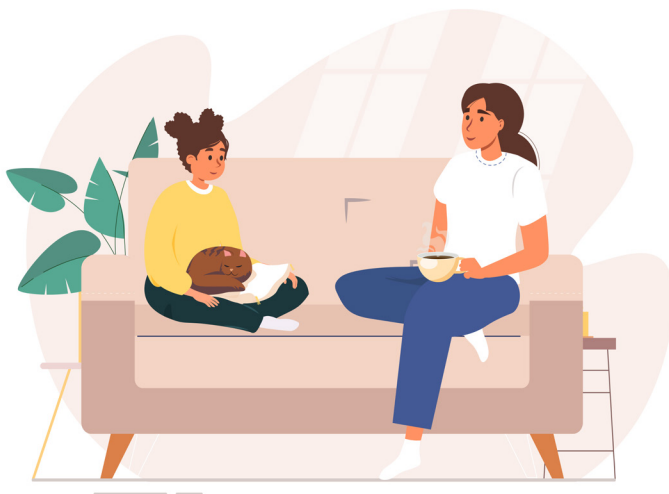
► Learn three ways to monitor your teen's behavior to minimize the risk of substance abuse.

The term “parental monitoring” is not just tracking or spying on your youth. “Monitoring” is defined as guiding your youth's behavior by focusing on building relationships and active involvement to help keep them safe. Starting in middle school and throughout high school, youth desire more freedom and privacy but still need advice, boundaries, guidance, and supervision. Research has consistently shown that youth who have parents who are present are less likely to try addictive substances, but when there is less parental monitoring, there is an increase in substance use, including vaping and smoking.

Parental monitoring can include many strategies, but some are not helpful. For example, when parents secretly get information by reading a journal, going through text messages, or listening in on conversations, youth are more likely to keep things a secret. Asking other adults or youth to get information about their teens' location and activities also backfires in many situations. Therefore, parents can benefit from learning useful types of parental monitoring. Below are three ways to monitor your teen's behavior and minimize their risk of substance use.

1. Stay Informed

Knowing about your youth's activities, social life, and location is important to the relationship and helps with monitoring. One way to do this is by creating a family culture of exchanging information. As parents, it may seem unnecessary to inform your youth about your life and location when you go out; however, doing so lets them trust you with this information too. Briefly discussing the day's schedule for everyone, every day can help you know your youth's location without snooping.



Parents may use apps to track their teen's location for many reasons, but it should not be done secretly. Transparency is key. Make sure that you have an agreement with your youth regarding tracking on apps or other devices. Whether you choose to track through technology or not, it is essential to talk to youth about the importance of sharing information with you.

Another way to stay informed is to become aware of the popular substances and drugs used in your area. Vaping may be popular, but other substances may be more popular in your youth's world. Knowing the substances is important so you can educate your youth about the risks of addiction or death from trying new drugs or seemingly familiar substances. Youth often hear or believe misinformation about vaping and other substances, so sending them information from trusted sources is important.

2. Know Their Friends

Knowing all your youth's friends can be hard if they have a large social group. However, most youth have a few close friends. It is important to know as many friends as you can. Research has shown that youth who start vaping or using other substances are usually influenced by their peers, so pay close attention to their social group. One way to do this is to create an environment where your teens feel comfortable inviting their friends to their home. When your teen can hang out with their friends at home, they are more likely to feel relaxed and open, giving you the opportunity to interact and observe their friends in a natural setting. This can help you understand who their friends are and whether they have a positive or negative influence. Another option is to set up events or outings that may help you connect with their friends. Ask them questions about their friends before you suspect something is wrong (how they met, what they like about them, how they are different or similar, etc.). Helping youth feel comfortable talking about their friends with you will create open communication if something does not go well or if the relationship shifts.

3. Set Clear Rules and Enforce Them

Setting rules may sometimes make your youth view you as overly strict. While some parents do not find this difficult, others may. Accepting temporary frustration from teens is okay if it means protecting them. Rules are important when it comes to substance use and have been proven to reduce the chances of youth vaping and using other substances. Clear rules can be set by having an open and honest conversation with your youth in a calm, caring, yet assertive way. Clear rules can look like this: "I care about you and your health; vaping is harmful to your health, so I need you to stay away from vaping." Conversations like this are received better than shouting or saying "because I said so." Conversations promote youth understanding and do not rely on fear. Calm conversations allow your youth to understand the why behind the rules you are setting and make space for discussion. When youth feel respected and heard, they are more likely to respond positively and follow the boundaries set. Consistent, calm communication also helps build trust, making it easier for youth to come to you with questions or concerns about peer pressure or other challenges they may face.



It is important to remember that home rules without enforcement do not work. Setting clear, consistent consequences for breaking established family rules is important, especially for teens. Consistent enforcement of rules provides the structure they need to navigate the teen years.

Conclusion

When parents take the time to directly ask their youth about their lives, without mixing in indirect methods of gathering information, they often have a clearer understanding of what their kids are doing. These conversations do not always have to be long. Scheduled updates can be brief or be done via text. Car rides are a great time to ask questions about friends or daily activities. Youth are more likely to open up when they feel their parents are genuinely interested in their lives and are supportive over time. Continue to talk and ask questions daily, whether they disclose or not, and model what you want them to do. This kind of open communication helps build trust and keeps parents informed. However, it is not just about asking questions. The way parents approach these conversations matters. Youth are more likely to share when they feel respected and not judged. Otherwise, they might hold back and hide information. Therefore, fostering a positive relationship with youth is important for monitoring and reducing risky behaviors, including vaping, among youth.



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