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Parent Toolkit

Section 5

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

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How to Talk to your Child about Smoking & Vaping

If you feel overwhelmed about what exactly to say to your child about tobacco products, you're not alone. To make it easier, we've provided suggestions below using what has worked for other parents.

<p>What you expect</p>	<p>Be clear about what you expect. While it's helpful to start the conversation with questions and hear your child's thoughts and experiences, be direct with them. Here are some example statements. Pick what suits your family best:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We don't want you to use tobacco or e-cigarettes." • "We disapprove of teens vaping." • "I'm proud of you for not using e-cigarettes." • "In our family, nobody under age 21 can smoke or vape."
<p>Why it's important</p>	<p>It's easy to say, "Don't do it because it's bad for you," but that's not as effective as explaining the reasons why it's bad for them. Also, remember young people don't think much about long-term health consequences, like cancer or heart attacks. Instead, focus on the immediate social consequences, such as getting in trouble or losing control due to nicotine addiction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The nicotine in tobacco and e-cigarettes is addictive. Once you start it's very hard to stop." • "What do you think would happen if you got caught vaping at school? You can get in big trouble like getting kicked off the team/out of the club." • "Nicotine is bad for your brain. It makes it hard to think clearly around friends and in school."
<p>How to respond</p>	<p>Your child may have been invited to smoke or vape and didn't know what to do. Ask open-ended questions and make it clear that you are listening to them. Teach them how to respond with some refusal skills and exit strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "If anyone is pushing you to do anything you don't want to, just call. I'll pick you up, no questions asked. Better safe than sorry." • "If someone offers you an e-cigarette, say something like this: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 'No way! Coach/my mom would be really mad if I got caught vaping.' ○ 'I'm not getting in trouble just for that.' ○ 'I can't afford to get addicted to that junk.'
<p>If they do it</p>	<p>It's natural to feel upset if you find out that your child has experimented with tobacco. You may need to take a few minutes to yourself before talking with your child. Remember to convey that you love them but disapprove of the behavior. Remind them about the family rules about smoking and be clear about the consequences. A small consequence will get the message across whereas severe consequences may have the opposite effect. Here are some consequences that parents have used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of phone privileges for 1 week • Loss of 1 month of allowance • Limitations on social activities for 2 weeks • Writing a report to the parent about the dangers of e-cigarettes <p>If your child is caught vaping multiple times, it may be time to treat the addiction. To help your child quit vaping, have them go to truthinitiative.org/thisisquitting or text DITCHJUUL to 88709.</p>

Be Ready for Tough Questions about Vaping

While most parents expect their child not to smoke or vape, studies show that you need to make that expectation clear. Despite what your child says or does, you still have a lot of influence on their decisions. Lots of parents have found it helpful to practice their responses to tough questions. We've put together a worksheet to help you answer some possible tough questions your child might ask you.

Why don't you want me to use e-cigarettes (or tobacco)?

Here are some suggestions on how to respond:

- Science shows that there are addictive and dangerous chemicals in e-cigarettes and tobacco products.
- Because you are still growing, nicotine is especially addictive and can harm your brain permanently.
- The tiny particles that are inhaled when someone uses e-cigarettes can harm their lungs making it harder for them to breath, make asthma worse, give them a bad cough, nose bleeds, and more.

Make it your own:

E-cigarettes just have nicotine and none of the “bad stuff” like cigarettes. Who cares?

- Nicotine is still a problem. It makes it hard to think clearly around friends and in school.
- Since your brain is still growing, nicotine is especially harmful for you.
- Using e-cigarettes makes it 6.8 times more likely you'll get addicted to regular cigarettes later. It can even change your brain, so you are more likely you'll get addicted to other substances like alcohol or drugs.
- We don't know the all the long-term effects for all the chemicals inside e-cigarettes.

Make it your own:

At least I wouldn't be smoking cigarettes or doing something worse. It's just a vape.

- I'm proud that you're making good decisions. E-cigarettes can still harm your body and brain even if they don't have the same toxins.
- Whether you get nicotine from an e-cigarette or other tobacco products, it is still risky for your brain.
- E-cigarettes haven't been around long enough for us to know all the possible harms they cause.
- Just because e-cigarettes are shown to be safer, that doesn't mean they're healthy or even safe.

Make it your own:

Everybody is doing it. It's not a big deal.

- Thank you for being honest with me. Science shows that there are a lot of bad things that come from using e-cigarettes like lung injury, addiction, brain changes, and more. That's a big deal.
- Every time a young person vapes, they risk short and long term health consequences.

Make it your own:

You smoke cigarettes/use e-cigarettes. Why shouldn't I?

- Just because I smoke/vape, doesn't mean you should. Once you are addicted, it's really hard to quit.
- It's legal for me to smoke/vape but not for you. There are laws to protect you because nicotine permanently damages growing brains.
- If I had a chance to go back and change time, I would not have started smoking or using e-cigarettes. Nicotine is very addictive, making it really hard to stop.
- I plan to try to quit again sometime. It takes most people many tries to quit for good. I don't want you to have to go through what I have gone through. If you don't start, you'll never have to stop.

Make it your own:

Find more information at:

CATCH My Breath: Catch.org/pages/CMB-Parent-Resources
The Surgeon General: e-cigarettes.SurgeonGeneral.gov
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: CDC.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/index.htm
Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids: TobaccoFreeKids.org
Parents Against Vaping e-cigarettes: ParentsAgainstVaping.org
Nemours Children's Health Care and Parenting Tips: KidsHealth.org