

Preventing Youth Tobacco Use: The Important Role of Parents

Most parents do not want their kids to smoke. Smoking causes a wide range of serious health problems – including lung cancer, heart disease, and stroke – and can result in premature disability and death. Studies have found that parental actions, attitudes, and opinions about smoking have a great deal of influence on whether or not kids smoke.

Parents may not know what to do or how to talk to their kids about not smoking. Fortunately, there are a number of effective actions parents can take to protect their kids from starting to smoke and encourage their kids to remain or become tobacco free.

Some effective actions parents can take:

- **If you don't smoke, don't start!** If you do smoke, quit! Research shows that children who have a parent who smokes are more likely to smoke and to be heavier smokers at young ages. When parents quit smoking, their children become less likely to start smoking and more likely to quit if they already smoke.
- **If you smoke, share your struggles to quit with your children.** Kids underestimate how difficult it is to quit smoking. Showing how hard it is to quit can help eliminate this misperception.



- **Maintain a smoke-free home.** A smoke-free home makes children less likely to smoke, even if their parents smoke. By not allowing anyone to smoke in their homes, parents not only make smoking less convenient for their kids but also make a powerful statement that they believe smoking is undesirable.
- **Tell your kids that you don't want them to smoke and will be disappointed if they do.** Parental attitudes, opinions, and feelings about their kids' smoking status greatly influence whether or not kids will smoke, when the parents smoke.
- **Make sure your kids have the facts they need.** By making sure that their kids know how harmful smoking is, parents can help their kids develop a firm, negative perception or attitude about smoking practices and their consequences. Kids with negative perceptions or attitudes are less likely to smoke.
- **Let your kids know that "Other Tobacco Products" are not safe alternatives to cigarettes and smoking.** OTPs include: Disposable tobacco products resembling mints, toothpicks, and melt-away breath fresheners; flavored, dissolvable tobacco lozenges; and chewing tobacco and cigars. Low-tar and additive-free products are not safe either.
- **Emphasize the immediate, negative health effects.** Most teenagers believe that smoking will have no direct effect on their health until they are older. But smoking causes many immediate effects on health, including persistent coughs, respiratory problems, a greater susceptibility to illness and colds, and decreased physical performance.





- **Emphasize the effects of smoking on physical appearance.** Movies and cigarette ads create the image that smoking is sexy and attractive, and kids identify improving self-image as a reason for smoking.

- **Destroy the myth that everybody smokes.** Many kids overestimate the amount of smoking among their peers, and such overestimation is among the strongest predictors of smoking initiation. For example, teens believe that 67% of adults smoke and that 54% of teens are current smokers, but less than 25% of adults and 17% of all teens actually do.

True False

Sources:

How Parents Can Protect Their Kids From Becoming Addicted Smokers. Campaign For Tobacco-Free Kids, www.tobaccofreekids.org.

What You(th) Should Know About Tobacco. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Smoking and Tobacco Use, Resources for Children and Adolescents, <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco>.

Additional Resources for parents and families:

Michigan Department of Community Health Tobacco Section: 517-335-8376

Download a Smoker's Quit Kit: www.michigan.gov/tobacco

Order a free, hard copy of Quit Kit, ACS. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW

Kid's Health. <http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/smoking.html>

Parents.TheAntiDrug. <http://www.theantidrug.com/drug-information/commonly-abused-drugs/tobacco-nicotine.aspx>

Tar Wars. www.tarwars.org

Medline Plus. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/smokingandyouth.html>

Kick Butts Day. <http://www.kickbuttsday.org>

American Lung Association. Tips for Parents. <http://www.lungusa.org>

