

How to Talk About Vaping with Your Kid

A Step-by-Step Guide for Success



Introduction

Over the past few years, America's youth have been turning to e-cigarettes at a meteoric rate, a trend so unsettling that the US surgeon general has called it an "epidemic."

Not only is vaping becoming an everyday challenge for youth who face marketing and social pressure from every angle, but it's also creating new and unique challenges for caregivers and parents who want to support their children and help them make choices that lead to being vape free.

The way vaping shows up in our lives is different for all of us. Perhaps you found an e-cig device in your child's pocket on laundry day or caught him or her in the act. Maybe your child has told you they've tried it or confided in you because they're feeling overwhelmed by peer pressure. Or maybe you simply have a hunch he or she has picked it up. The bottom line is you've reached a turning point and are looking for guidance about what to do next.

For many of us, that means having a conversation that, when it comes to talking to teens, especially about things like tobacco, nicotine, and, now, vaping, can get awkward. No matter how vaping is affecting you and your child, this conversation guide may help.

This guide is full of tips, tools, and strategies to set you up for successful vaping conversations. When it comes to communication, there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution, and you'll likely need to experiment with a few approaches to find out what works for you and your family.

This guide will point you in the right direction by doing four things:



Help you set expectations for meaningful conversations.



Give you insights on how to get the conversation started.



Offer tips and tools for having constructive conversations.



Provide resources for ongoing support.



Take on an Adolescent Point of View



Set Realistic Expectations



Be Prepared with Reliable Vaping Information



Gather Your Thoughts, Have a Plan



Prepare to Be Calm and Patient



Know Your Child



Consider Your Own Behavior



Ask Questions

Eight Steps to a More Fruitful Conversation

1. Take on an Adolescent Point of View

Take a step back and try seeing the situation from your child's point of view. Teens face a lot of stress from school, social pressure, and body changes. It's a time when they're gaining independence while their brains and decision-making skills are still developing, which can lead to risky behaviors. Have you asked yourself lately, "What were they thinking?" The short answer is likely, "They weren't thinking at all!"

Trying to grant your kid freedom while ensuring his or her safety and advising without coming across as controlling or intrusive is a balancing act. If your conversation takes a bad turn, it may have the opposite effect than what you're hoping for, and your child may take up vaping out of angst or just hide it from you.

Instead, you need to lay the groundwork for an empathetic conversation built around mutual understanding. **While your teen may show independence by putting you on a need-to-know basis, your child may open up about how vaping affects him or her if they feel that they're in a safe space where their thoughts and opinions will be valued.** If you can allow your child to express their concerns in a nonjudgmental way, he or she may give you the space to do the same. This reciprocation allows your kid to consider any advice you give in a way that supports his or her independent decision making.



2. Set Realistic Expectations

You may envision that your kid will stop vaping immediately after you talk with him or her. The reality is that helping your child stop vaping may take multiple conversations. With that in mind, look at this communication process as a series of small steps that leads to a larger goal. The first step is opening the door to communication about vaping. You may want to bring it up naturally in conversation or ask your child to simply share his or her point of view.

Consider these two example conversation starters. Which will more likely be more productive?

Example 1: Lauren and Kris

Lauren found a JUUL pod on her son Kris’s dresser. A wave of emotions overcame her. She felt angry, betrayed, and, above all, worried. When Kris walked in the door from school, Lauren pounced on him. Before Kris even took off his coat, Lauren held up the JUUL pod she found and shot off a series of questions: “So, what’s this about? Is this a vaping device? Do you know how dangerous this thing is? Haven’t you been following the news?”

Without looking up, Kris replied, “It isn’t mine.” He immediately went to his room and slammed the door.

Lauren opened his door and said, “You’re grounded, mister.”

Example 2: Lee and Yuki

Lee found a JUUL pod in his son Yuki’s pants on laundry day, confirming his concerns: Yuki is vaping—or at least experimenting. Lee knew he needed to have a conversation with his son and that it couldn’t happen at just any time. It needed to be the right time. So, at dinner, Lee casually brought it up, “I’ve been hearing about vaping in the news a lot lately, so I’ve been hyper-aware.”

“Oh yeah?” Yuki replied.

“Yeah,” Lee said. “And today, I found a vape cartridge in the laundry basket. So, I need to ask you, what do you think of vaping?”

3. Be Prepared with Reliable Vaping Information

A lot of facts and fiction about vaping are coming out all the time. Before your discussion, learn your facts, and have them close by. This will help you back up your side of the conversation and help your teen see the truth. Consider the following vaping stats as a starting point:

Youth and Young Adults Use of E-Cigarettes

- The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2016) reported that electronic nicotine delivery systems, or e-cigarettes, are now the most used form of tobacco by youth in the United States.
- In 2019, a National Youth Tobacco Survey found that 27 percent of high school students and 10 percent of middle school students used e-cigarettes in the last 30 days.
- Reports show that, in 2016, nearly four in five adolescents had been exposed to e-cigarettes ads.
- E-cigarettes may benefit adults who aren't pregnant who vape as a complete substitute for combustible cigarettes.
- There's clear evidence that e-cigarettes aren't safe for youth, young adults, and pregnant women.
- Studies show that those who start using e-cigs are more likely to use combustible tobacco later in life than those who don't use vaping products.
- Youth and young-adult brains develop into their 20s, and exposure to nicotine through e-cigarettes can affect this development.
- Nicotine changes the way young adults' brain synapses are formed, which can harm the parts that control attention and learning.
- Aerosol from e-cigarettes can contain harmful chemicals, including nicotine and ultrafine particles that can be inhaled deep into the lungs.
- The flavorings in these aerosols can contain harmful chemicals linked to serious lung diseases.
- Secondhand e-cigarette vapors pose a risk to youth and young adults.

- Vaping is expensive. In 2016, the average prefilled cartridge cost \$14.36. At one cartridge a week, it would cost a teen about \$750 a year.
- E-cigarette and tobacco companies target kids with ads in stores, on TV, in movies, and on social media, often using paid influencers. Companies spend more than \$120 million on advertising each year.

4. Gather Your Thoughts, Have a Plan

Once you have your facts, think of how you might construct the conversation. Think of outcomes you'd like from it and topics you'd like to cover. Then, instead of cornering your kid when he or she gets home from school, be strategic about the right time to have the conversation. Consider bringing it up during a shared activity, such as while watching TV, attending a sporting event, shopping at the mall, riding in the car, or walking by a vape shop. And, because youth are used to communicating on their phones, you may find that texting is a good way to start the conversation.

5. Prepare to Be Calm and Patient

Even though you might feel worried, scared, angry, or a mixture of emotions, plan on setting them aside during the conversation. If you become overwhelmed with emotions, you may not clearly state your point of view and, instead, veer off topic.

6. Know Your Child

It may sound silly, but when it comes to communication, one size does not fit all. Consider your child's needs, values, and beliefs; past experiences; circle of friends; and other factors that will influence how and when you'll discuss vaping. Understanding your kid's point of view and the sources of his or her beliefs may help you approach the conversation in a more empathetic light.

7. Consider Your Own Behavior

Do you vape or smoke regular cigarettes? You may want to consider quitting—or at least committing to quit—so you can offer advice as a role model. Quitting can be difficult, so be prepared to have an honest conversation about addiction and how challenging quitting can be.

8. Ask Questions

It's time for the talk. Above all, give your child room to speak, and do your best to listen calmly and with curiosity. This will help open the door to free-flowing dialogue. Vaping is a topic that requires multiple conversations. Some might last a long time and feel intense. Others might be brief and light—and that's okay.

To help you keep the conversation going, ask yourself these questions:

- How will I respond if my kid brushes me off? Remember that vaping is an ongoing conversation. It's okay if one conversation falls short. Keep the door open to ongoing dialogue.
- How will I respond if my kid says he or she doesn't vape? Congratulate your child for a job well done. And remember to check in at a later date. Things change.
- How will I respond if my kid says he or she vapes? Stay calm. Start the conversation over using the tools you've learned in these lessons. Remember to listen, and guide your child toward positive choices.
- How will I respond if my kid gets upset that I brought up the topic or the conversation isn't going the way I hoped? You may want to plan for these moments. Remember that there will be more conversations.

Tips for Having the Vaping Conversation

Expect the Conversation to Be Ongoing

In reality, you'll likely need multiple conversations—and that's okay. Plan on it. And take each as a step in the right direction. Consider the following examples to illustrate what this ongoing conversation might look like.



Example 1: Kelly and June

Kelly had multiple conversations about vaping with her daughter, June.

During their first chat, Kelly asked June a general question:
“How do you feel about vaping?”

“I’m not sure,” June replied. “I haven’t given it much thought.”

“That’s fair,” Kelly answered. “Maybe think about it, because I think about you and your health all the time.”

Later in the week, Kelly approached June again. “Let’s go to the mall this weekend,” she said. “We can look at boots, grab a bite to eat, and talk about stuff in general.”

“Sounds good,” June replied.

“I also want to continue our conversation about vaping,” Kelly added.

Example 2: Garrett and Ben

Garrett found a vape pen in his son Ben’s pocket.

“Can you tell me about this?” asked Garrett, holding up the pen.

“It belongs to a friend,” replied Ben, quietly. “I know it’s a bad habit, and I don’t want that stuff in my body.”

A couple weeks later, Garrett and Ben drove to Ben’s high school to watch a basketball game. Pulling up to the school, they saw a few of Ben’s classmates vaping. Garrett seized the opportunity to check in with his son.

“Look at them,” said Garrett. “With your friends vaping, and kids like this vaping, is it hard not to join in when you see it all around you?”

“Yeah, it can be,” responded Ben, looking out the window.

“But I’ve got this, Dad. You don’t need to worry.”

Conversation Dos and Don'ts

When thinking and having conversations about vaping with your child, keep the following dos and don'ts in mind:

- **Do** observe and listen: Giving your child space to speak his or her mind will likely lead to a more fruitful conversation. If your kid feels like you're listening and not judging, he or she may open up and allow the conversation to unfold naturally. Your job is to be open to what your child is saying, not interrupt, and respond accurately when he or she asks you a question.
- **Don't** lecture, explain, or blame: Conversations rooted in these types of things are sure to end before they really begin. Your child might give you an eye roll, tune you out, or get flustered and leave.

Less Is More

Instead of inundating your child with facts and questions, be calculated by pacing the conversation and being strategic about the information you share. Because you'll likely need multiple conversations to address vaping with your child, take each exchange as an opportunity to share one or two nuggets of information, then spend the rest of the time listening. The more you listen, the more likely your child will be to ask for your thoughts.

Approach the Conversation with Curiosity

The questions you ask and how you ask them make a big difference in the success of the conversation. Instead of asking "Did you vape at the party?" consider "How does vaping show up in your life?" Asking open-ended questions like this (i.e., questions that require more than a simple yes or no response) will allow your child to express himself or herself. Such questions will also show your kid you care. In addition, approaching the conversation with curiosity allows your child to see a "healthy" decision for himself or herself and come to a conclusion that aligns with his or her values.

Practice Actively Listening without Judgment

Just let your child talk, pay attention to the details, and don't interrupt. If you're someone who traditionally cuts in, your child might see this as some sort of test. But, over time, if you keep listening, he or she may share the whole story. And if that happens, don't overreact. Instead, ask an open-ended question again, perhaps something like this: "How did trying vaping make you feel?"

Be Strategic about the Time and Place

Of course, you may not always have a choice about when and where the

conversation takes place. If your child brings up the topic, seize the opportunity. If you're the one looking to strike up the conversation, think about all the variables that could make the conversation go more smoothly—or make it worse. Consider setting up a time at a fun family outing, a baseball game, or at the mall. Pair the conversation with something positive, and remember to have the talk in a space where you can actively listen, and your child will feel comfortable opening up.

Conversation Starters

You can start the vaping conversation with your child in a variety of ways. Here are some ideas to get you started.

General Opening Questions

You can begin with more general questions about vaping, such as these:

- What have you heard about vaping?
- What do kids like about vaping?
- How does vaping show up in your school?
- Do you think kids know they inhale nicotine when they vape and how addictive nicotine is?

Discussions about Tobacco Companies

Ask your child:

- Have you seen ads about vaping products? What were they like?
- What do you know about tobacco companies and how they market to kids?
- Do you know how much tobacco companies pay for ads each year? What do you think about that?

If Your Kid Is Vaping

If you know your child is vaping, perhaps you'll want to start the conversation here:

- How does vaping make you feel?
- When did you start, and what prompted you to start?
- When you started, did you expect to get hooked?
- What are your thoughts on the cost of vaping?
- Have you ever tried to stop vaping? How did it make you feel? If you haven't tried, how does that make you feel?

Do you suspect your kid vapes? [Read this article](#) for clues to find out.

Additional Resources

Know The Risks

<https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/resources.html>

E-Cigarettes: Talk to Youth About the Risks

<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/features/back-to-school/e-cigarettes-talk-to-youth-about-risks/index.html>

E-Cigarettes, or Vaping, Products Visual Dictionary

https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/pdfs/ecigarette-or-vaping-products-visual-dictionary-508.pdf