



Parents and guardians are often worried about talking to children and young people about drugs. Some of the concerns that adults have, are about knowing when it is appropriate to talk to a child about drugs and what exactly should be said in the conversation. This information sheet has been prepared to help parents and guardians to begin a conversation with their child about drugs. While **most young people will never try an illegal drug**, this does not mean they will never come in contact with illegal drugs or drug users. **Talking to your child about drugs is an extremely important piece of drug prevention work.**

Before you begin a conversation about drugs with your child, it is important to think about our own understanding of what a drug is. Using the right language is also important. Often both children and adults will talk about 'good drugs' and 'bad drugs', however, approaching the topic of drugs in this way can be counter productive. This is because everyone has different notions about what are good drugs or bad ones. This can lead to tricky conversations! Most children and adults consider medicines to be good drugs, however, if medicines are misused they can be extremely dangerous. So from experience, it is much more useful when talking about drugs to children or young people, to talk about drugs in terms of whether they are **legal, illegal** or **prescribed** rather than good or bad.

Picking an appropriate time to talk about drugs is important also. Sitting down to have 'the big drug talk' is not the best approach. Try to talk about drugs in an informal and relaxed way. **It is never too early to talk to a child or young person about drugs, once the conversation is age appropriate.** For children under 10, it is appropriate to talk about staying safe around medicines or potentially harmful substances in the home such as detergents or other cleaning products. For older children (11+) it is appropriate to talk about how medicines and alcohol can be harmful when misused. For children 11-12 years of age, it is appropriate for your child to begin understanding that illegal drugs are harmful substances that are prohibited, by law, from being produced, sold or bought. For primary school aged children, it is best not to talk about drugs that children themselves do not know about.

Adults often worry that children and young people know more about drugs than them. From experience, children and young people are often familiar with some street names for illegal drugs, however, their knowledge of these drugs is often very poor and they can be very unaware or mis-informed about drug effects. While they might know lots of different drug names, this does not necessarily mean they know what the drug is, what it looks like or what effect it may have on a user.

When talking about illegal drugs, try not to get bogged down with their effects, rather focus on the fact that illegal drugs are made without quality controls. When discussing illegal drugs, focus on the fact that when someone buys an illegal drug, they have no way of knowing whether it is the drug they are told it is. They have no way of knowing how strong the drug is, or whether it contains other harmful substances. **A key message to get across to children and young people, is that every time someone takes an illegal drug, they are taking an extremely dangerous risk.** It is also important to make children and young people aware that drugs affect everyone differently. Just because one person takes a drug and appears ok, does not mean their



(© Clay Darcy, 2018)