



# High-School Transition: The Importance of Talking to Your Kids About Substance Use

When kids enter high school they have more freedom coupled with increased academic demands and social stress. This can lead to a higher risk of unhealthy behaviors. Plus, they often have the false perception that “everyone is doing it” – particularly around substance use. However, studies show that when youth have regular conversations about substance use with a trusted parent, caregiver, coach, or other adults they are less likely to drink alcohol and use drugs compared to other students. In fact, these conversations are one of the most effective prevention methods against the use of alcohol and other substances.



If your incoming high school student is like other kids, they love their freedom and are trying to find their identity. While they need your guidance, they want it on their own terms. Instead of first turning to you, they might look to friends and social media for advice. This can lead to exaggerated beliefs about the prevalence of substance use and misinformation.

Prevention is lifelong and parents and other adults play a critical role during life transitions such as going to high school. We encourage you to start and continue talking with youth to support prevention and healthy behaviors.

## TIPS TO START THE CONVERSATION

### Share the Facts

Be honest with youth about alcohol and other drug facts to empower them to make their own healthy decisions.

- Not everyone is doing it! 85% percent of Westbrook High School students reported they have not had any alcohol or vaped in the past 30 days, and only 83% had used cannabis in that time period.\*
- Their brain is not fully developed until about 25.\*\* Using substances before then can increase the risk of addiction or lifelong health problems.
- You are more likely to experience addiction if you used alcohol or other substances before their brain is fully developed.



### Encourage Them to Take Responsibility for Their Health

Many healthy lifestyle choices are protective factors against teen substance misuse. Consider discussing the following topics to support a healthy lifestyle:

- How do they use technology and when is it time to shut it off?
- How can they deal with stress in a healthy way?
- What do they like to do to stay active?
- What do they value in their relationships with peers?

### Be Curious

Instead of being the authority, invite your child to teach you. Learn what health means to them, what their friends are doing/saying, and how they perceive certain substances and behaviors. From there, you can continue conversations that are relevant to your child including prevention topics.



### Teach Them about Boundaries

Help teens learn how to assert themselves. Youth are more likely to be introduced to alcohol or other drugs by someone they know. While a simple “no thanks” may be all they need to say, you may want to ask questions to help them practice what responses to set their boundaries. Examples include:

- “What would you say to a friend who offered you alcohol or any other substance?”
- “If someone you care about doesn’t respect your opinion or choice, what can you do?”
- “What other situations are you worried about encountering?”
- If you are in a situation, such a party, where substances are being used, how would you leave?

### FMI:

Westbrookpartnersforprevention.org  
Facebook.com/WestbrookPFP  
Instagram.com/WestbrookPFP



\*2023 The Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS)

\*\*American Academy of Pediatrics, 2017

