

Let's talk about...

# Drugs & Alcohol

A Conversation Starter Toolkit



<sup>SIR</sup>  
**david  
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FOUNDATION

# This could be awkward

We get it. Speaking to your child about drugs and alcohol can be uncomfortable. But it's important. Really important.

That's why we've created this Conversation Starter Toolkit.

Developed in conjunction with experienced Youth Workers, it's packed with accurate information and practical tips for having conversations with your child that will break the ice and help spark ongoing discussions.

## First things first

### It's up to you:

In the real world, it's unlikely your child will bring up the subject of drugs and alcohol. So you'll need to make the first move. By being open, honest and curious (without judgement) you'll lay the groundwork for them to share their thoughts more freely with you.

### Take the pressure off:

Having one big conversation that covers the entire topic of drugs and alcohol with your child is way too daunting. It's also not as effective as having smaller, ongoing chats that open up a two-way dialogue and normalise the subject. So take the pressure off and take a look at our conversation starters to find a way to get the ball rolling in a way that works for you and your child.



# Let's go

This is general advice only. For further support contact the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015. For crisis support contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

## Setting the stage for a meaningful discussion

- 1 Approach the conversation with genuine curiosity and a willingness to engage.
- 2 Know the facts and be honest.
- 3 Avoid accusatory language or a lecturing tone.
- 4 You don't need to have all the answers. If you don't, discover them together.
- 5 Listen and give your child space to respond without interruption.
- 6 Pick the right time and place – give the conversation your full attention, without distractions.

## Conversation starters

To kick-off a conversation try starting with short, open-ended questions about drugs and alcohol in general. Ask your child's opinion. Check in to see if they have questions. Listen without comment or judgement – even if their ideas are different from yours. Remember, how you listen can be more important than what you say. Using pop culture prompts, such as movies, songs or TV shows, can be a useful way to integrate substance-related discussions into your everyday interactions and create a natural dialogue.

### Use pop culture

"I watched [TV show] last night and there's a scene where a group of young kids are drinking heavily. Does this happen with kids you know at school? What would you do in that situation?"

"I saw this documentary about [topic related to substance use], and it brought up some interesting viewpoints. It made me wonder, what are your views on drugs and alcohol?"

### Test some hypothetical situations

"How would you handle it if someone offered you drugs/alcohol?"

"Whatever's happening, if you ever need help you can always call me. Did you know that?"

"If your friends were drinking or taking drugs at a party, how would you feel about that?"

**A REMINDER ABOUT STIGMA:** Stigma is a negative attitude or idea about a person and is generally based on assumptions. It can lead to feelings of judgement and shame. When someone feels stigmatised, they're less likely to reach out for help. To reduce the impact of stigma, try to focus on the person, not on their use of drugs or alcohol. The words you use can have a big impact - choose them wisely and with compassion.



# Some helpful responses

In Australia, drug and alcohol use amongst young people is prevalent. Approximately 30% of 14-19 year olds drink at levels that risk harm, accident or injury. While 33% of all 16-17 year olds have tried at least one type of illegal substance including: cannabis, hallucinogens, amphetamines, ecstasy, opiates or cocaine.

Here are some things you could say in response to your child if they've had a drug or alcohol experience.

**If your child says:**

**“Someone at the party had some and I thought I'd try it”**

- Thank them for their honesty and ask if they knew what they were taking. Discuss the effects of the drug/alcohol.
- Ask if they felt pressured, and if they did, discuss some ways to say 'no' (see following for some ideas).

**If they say:**

**“It made me feel really good”**

- Ask how they've been feeling in general. This is a good time to offer help or learn more about what's going on in their life.
- Talk about some healthy, practical ways to feel good, such as exercise, playing a sport, or pursuing a hobby.

**If they say:**

**“I don't want to talk about it”**

- Let them know that you're available if they want to speak about it later - your door is always open.
- Ask if you can help them find someone else to talk to, like a counsellor or psychologist.
- Let them know they can talk to someone else outside the family if they'd feel more comfortable.

**If your child says:**

**“I just always wanted to try it”**

- Thank them for their honesty, and ask what appealed to them about it.
- Ask if it was what they expected, and explore the risks with them.

**If they say:**

**“It made me feel like all my problems went away”**

- Explain that you're always available if they want to talk about anything.
- Suggest that you'd like to help them work through any problems.
- Ask if they'd like to explore the problems – is this something they'd like to resolve?
- Ask if it felt like the problems came back after the drug/alcohol wore off.
- Explain that often what makes drugs/alcohol feel good can end up making things worse over time.

# Ways to say 'no'

It can be difficult for young people to say 'no' to peers offering them drugs and alcohol – even when they want to. In one of your discussions, we suggest you and your child run through scenarios and workshop ways they could say 'no' that work for them.

**TIP:** It's best to keep things short and simple. No complicated reasons are necessary when you say 'no' to drugs or alcohol – it's your choice. Just be clear and direct with your response to discourage further invitation or pressure.

Here are some ideas to get you started, but we recommend crafting something that feels easy to say and authentic for you and the situation:

"No thanks, not tonight. You go ahead."

"No thanks, I need to study tomorrow."

"Thanks, but I've got to get up early. I'm going to leave you to it."

"Thanks but it's not my thing. I don't want to bring anyone down so I'm going to head out."

"No, not right now. I want to catch up with Kara – I haven't seen her all night."

"No thanks. If I come home high/drunk my parents will never let me go out again."

"No thanks, I've got to work in the morning."

And remember, if you're feeling uncomfortable, you can always leave the situation.

# The facts



**24%**

of young people aged 12-24 have engaged in harmful drug use.



**30%**

of 14-19 year olds drink at levels that risk harm, accident or injury.



**83%**

of risky drinkers aged 14-19 were injured as a result of their drinking.



**33%**

of all 16-17 year olds have tried at least one type of illegal substance including: cannabis, hallucinogens, amphetamines, ecstasy, opiates or cocaine.



**38%**

of all people in alcohol and drug treatment programs are aged under 30.



**77%**

of young Australians aged 14-17 who have used drugs made the decision to first use a drug due to curiosity.

## Resources

Across Australia, there are many incredible organisations that offer help and information. Please, don't hesitate to reach out if you need support. You'll be glad you did.

### Where you can get help

- [Sir David Martin Foundation](#)
- [Lifeline](#)
- [Family Drug Support Australia](#)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Reach Out](#)
- [Your Room | NSW Health and the Alcohol And Drug Information Service](#)

## References

For further reading:

- [Growing Happy, Healthy Young Minds](#)
- Doing Drugs with Paul Dillon: [doingdrugs-darta.blogspot.com](http://doingdrugs-darta.blogspot.com)
- [Things to try: Alcohol - ReachOut Parents](#)
- [Drug and Alcohol Education: Parent Booklet - Positive Choices](#)
- [Getting Started - Alcohol and Drug Foundation](#)
- [How to Talk So Teens Will Listen & Listen So Teens Will Talk](#)
- [The Power of Words-Practical Guide.pdf \(adf.org.au\)](#)

\* Source: [Australia's youth: Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

This is a  
judgement  
free zone



**Print and cut  
out this card.**

Give it to your child and ask them to use it when they want to initiate a difficult conversation.

**The 'deal'**

When your child gives you this card you must stop what you're doing and make yourself available. You must allow the young person to speak freely, share their feelings, raise concerns, ask questions and be heard without interruption or judgement.

This card is a powerful tool that says to a young person, "I won't get mad – I'll listen to you and work with you on a solution."

# Sir David Martin Foundation

## About us

We're so glad you've downloaded this Conversation Starter Toolkit.

As an organisation, Sir David Martin Foundation is passionate about bringing awareness and support to young people experiencing addiction.

Established by the late Governor of NSW, Sir David Martin, and his wife, Lady Martin, the Foundation was created to help young people in crisis rebuild their lives.

Thanks to the incredible support of our donors, we have raised over \$70 million since 1990.

These funds have enabled us to work on best practice models of treatment for young people with drug and alcohol addiction, and become the major funder of Mission Australia's Triple Care Farm.

Located in the NSW Southern Highlands, the farm's holistic treatment centre provides a safe, nurturing environment for young people to detox, get well and begin the next chapter of their lives. At the farm, young people initially attend David Martin Place, the first (and only) youth Withdrawal Centre in NSW. They then spend 12 weeks in the comprehensive residential rehabilitation program.

With the support of Team180 – our wonderful group of monthly donors – the Foundation helps fund the Aftercare program that provides vital help to young people in the critical 180 days after leaving rehab. This life-saving program helps young people stay well, build the foundations for their new future and turn their lives around.



Sir David Martin

### Watch Bailey's inspiring story



After completing treatment at Triple Care Farm young people can begin afresh



**99%**  
free from chronic substance use



**78%**  
in stable housing



**78%**  
engaged in training or employment

**1990**

The Foundation was established to help young people in crisis.

**2017**

David Martin Place opened – the first youth Withdrawal Centre in NSW.



**2022**

Youth Network launched – a national expansion of the Aftercare program.

**To date**

We've raised over \$70 million for youth addiction thanks to compassionate people like you.

To find out more about Sir David Martin Foundation visit: [martinfoundation.org.au](https://martinfoundation.org.au)  
Or to join Team180 visit: [martinfoundation.org.au/team180](https://martinfoundation.org.au/team180)

Sir David Martin Foundation thanks Mission Australia, our service partner for Triple Care Farm and the Youth Network Aftercare program. Mission Australia own and run Triple Care Farm.

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