



## **Talking to Your Kids About Drug Addiction**

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Parents have many responsibilities and one of them is to ensure that communication about difficult subjects occurs. Because of the easy access to street drugs, it is therefore important that you are able to provide the education and environment to talk that will protect your child from using and becoming dependent.

Following are some tips to help you with this process:

**Start early** - Unfortunately children are exposed to the idea of drug use through movies, technology and media. Sometimes the lives of people who children view as "heroes" in society are using drugs and their behaviours can therefore easily be misinterpreted as being acceptable. The availability of drugs has also allowed even elementary children to have easy access to them. The best thing to do therefore is to begin talking about choices when children are young rather than waiting until they are in high school and might actually be facing problems.

**Make sure you are well informed**- I remember a few years ago when my friend was laughing about how her daughter and friends had baby soothers. What she didn't know was that they were using as a way to prevent clenching of teeth when using Ecstasy. You need to make sure that you have enough accurate information that you can share with your child and not be "fooled" by a culture that you might otherwise not understand.

**Know the resources to help you and your child**- There are several ways that you can gain knowledge and support regarding drugs. The Internet is a good place to get information but the telephone book will also provide you with a number of local organizations that provide individual or group training opportunities as well as support.

**Don't make assumptions** - Things are not exactly the way they were when you were younger and your child is not perfect. Just as you would need to help your child learn about sex and honesty, you will need to give good guidance about drug use. Do not assume that someone else will do this or that your child is smart enough to just say "no" without you.

**Be honest** - You are not protecting your child by hiding the ugly parts of dependency from him or her. Make sure that your child knows that you are concerned about this issue and have different expectations for the child. When Prince Harry was seventeen years old, his father sent him to a rehabilitation clinic because he admitted to drug and alcohol abuse. Prince Charles wanted his son to not only receive help but also understand that there are consequences associated with the choices he was making.

**Help develop and practice strategies for your child to use** - Peer pressure is a very powerful thing and children often do what others suggest out of fear or because they want to be accepted. It is therefore important that you help your child to think of ways to say "no" and have other options available to them. Role-play conversations with them and ensure that they have resources available to call on when they are needed.

**Leave the door open for further discussion** - Your child will need to be confident that s/he can come to you at any time for support and help. Invest yourself in establishing a good relationship in which you and the child enjoy open communication about all things.