

Raising Drug-Free Kids: Advice by Age

The Preschool Years



Since the foundation for all healthy habits — from nutritious eating to proper hygiene — is laid down during the preschool years, it's a great time to set the stage for a drug-free life. The following tips will help you work with your preschooler so that she'll grow up happy, healthy, and drug-free.

- **Talk to your child about the joys of healthy living.** Discuss how good you feel when you take care of yourself — how you can run, jump, play and work for many hours. A great conversation starter: "I'm glad I'm healthy because I can..."
- **Celebrate your child's decision-making skills.** Whenever possible, let your child choose what to wear. Even if the clothes don't quite match, you are reinforcing your child's ability to make decisions.
- **Stress the need for your child to take personal responsibility for his own health, well-being and personal environment.** Your instructions should be concrete, relate to your child's experiences, and be stated positively. Turn chores like brushing teeth, putting away toys, wiping up spills and caring for pets into fun experiences that your child will enjoy. Break the activities down into manageable steps so that your child learns to develop plans.
- **Help your child steer clear of dangerous substances that exist in her immediate world.** Point out poisonous and harmful chemicals commonly found in homes, such as bleach, kitchen cleansers and furniture polish. Read the products' warning labels out loud to your child. Explain that she should only eat or smell food or a prescribed medicine that you, a relative, or other known caregivers give to her. Also, explain that drugs from a doctor help the person the doctor gives them to, but that they can harm someone else.
- **Help your child understand the difference between make-believe and real life.** Preschoolers give meaning to things they don't understand in order to make sense of their world — but their meaning doesn't necessarily reflect the real world. Ask your child what he thinks about a TV program or story. Let your child know about your likes and dislikes. Discuss how violence or bad decisions can hurt people.
- **Turn frustration into a learning opportunity.** If a tower of blocks keeps collapsing during a play session, work with your child to find possible solutions to the problem.
- **Tell your child how proud you are of her when she helps you with things.** There's never a bad time to give your child a boost of self-esteem.

Substances in your preschooler's world can include: Tobacco, Alcohol, Cleaning supplies.