

## Teaching your children the truth about drugs and gambling

### OTHER TITLES

#### Create It

*Teaching your children to talk about their feelings*

*How can I help my young child learn to get along with others?*

*If you're a parent, you're a role model: How to teach your children by example*

#### Nurture It

*How can I teach my young child to deal with peer pressure?*

*Teaching your children the truth about drugs and gambling*

*How can I help my young child to be more confident?*

*How to listen actively to your children*

#### Choose It

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#### Get It Back

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*Supporting your son or daughter in recovery*

IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT talking to your children about drugs and gambling, good for you. Children can have no better help than a concerned parent who thinks ahead and wants to keep them informed to keep them safe from harm.

Kids are smart, and they are learning all the time. If you want them to believe what you tell them, it's important that you have some knowledge and that you are as truthful as you can be. You may also need to get past your own strong feelings about drugs and gambling if you want to prepare kids to make good decisions based on facts and not emotion.

### **You start teaching kids about drugs earlier than you think you do**

A drug is any substance, other than food, that changes the way the body and mind function. Your children have seen drugs since they were very young. Glue, for example, is used as a drug when people sniff it to get high. And antiperspirants, even used properly, change the way the body functions, so they are drugs too.

You teach a child about drugs when you tell them not to touch, taste or play with some common household products, and when you tell them not to touch drugs that adults use. These include coffee, tea, cigarettes, alcohol, or medications like antibiotics or aspirin. When you use these drugs in a responsible way, you are teaching kids how drugs should be used.

### **A drug is just a tool. It can do a lot of good, or it can do harm**

A tool is something used to accomplish a definite task. Drugs are tools we use to change the way our bodies work, or the way we feel about a situation. These changes can be positive or negative, safe or dangerous. Drugs are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Drugs are not good or evil.

What you want to teach your child is to use drugs responsibly. Some people find that there are times when a cup of coffee will help get them through a difficult task. For other people, the side effects of drinking coffee feel bad enough that they choose not to use it at all.

It is all right to teach your children where you stand on drugs like coffee, and that there are drugs that almost always do more harm than good.

### **They may already know something about gambling too**

Most kids have tried gambling long before they know anything about casinos. Gambling can be a normal part of socializing, or it can be a habit that ruins lives. Like drugs, it's the way that gambling is used that makes it harmful or helpful.

People often don't know that an activity is gambling, just as they often don't know that a substance (like alcohol) is a drug. Any time you risk money, property or something else of value on an activity with an uncertain outcome, you are gambling. So, when kids dare each other to walk along the top of a high fence, they are gambling: the kid who does the walking could gain status, and could be hurt by falling. They are risking something they value, whether they are conscious of it or not.

Children use gambling games to get new skills or sharpen their skills. Even though it may scare the parents, the kid walking the fence gets something from it: they learn better balance and they learn to perform when they're afraid or under pressure. They may also fall and learn that they

don't want to try that again. Most kids will at some time take risks that their parents won't like, but most parents realize that making mistakes is part of the learning process.

Kids gamble for entertainment, for the fun of sharing a risk with friends, and because they like to be known as winners.

Kids don't usually call their risking activities gambling; they call them betting or daring, or sometimes wagering. They will understand better what gambling is if you use those words.

As kids get older, they are more likely to bet money, toys or other property. The information and guidance you have given them about gambling will become even more important then.

### When is taking drugs or gambling harmful?

Taking too much of anything can hurt you. You can even die from drinking too much water (although it takes quite a lot!). When it's a substance that changes our minds and bodies as much as many drugs do, it doesn't take much for it to be harmful. Physical damage is the easiest to see. Kids have probably seen pictures of the polluted lungs of smokers, and you can see that drinking can change alcoholics' faces (broken blood vessels, misshapen noses) and damages hearts, livers and other organs.

Addiction counsellors, help people to decide whether they have problems with drugs or gambling by looking at a number of important life areas:

### Examples of important life areas

- **Medical:** has the habit hurt their health?
- **Occupational:** have they given too little attention to school or work because of this habit?
- **Financial:** is the habit costing more money than they can afford?
- **Relational:** are there problems with friends or family because of the habit?
- **Emotional:** is the habit causing the person to be emotionally troubled, to feel more anxious, sad or angry?
- **Legal:** are they getting into trouble with the law or risking legal trouble?

### What are some other important areas that you would add?

Examples may be spiritual, recreational (that is, fun!).

If gambling or the use of alcohol or other drugs is damaging any important parts of someone's life, that person is missing the chance to be the best person they can be. People actually can harm every area of their lives, not just with drugs, but with too much gambling as well. Problem gamblers, for example, may not feed themselves properly, or even go to the bathroom often enough, because they are afraid of missing a chance to play or to win.

### Is your child ready to learn about drugs and gambling?

As your children grow up, they will almost certainly have to make decisions about drug use or gambling. While you do not want to make your children grow up too fast by talking about something that is not yet in their lives, it is important to set the stage for future discussion of alcohol and other drug use or gambling. As a parent, you are the best judge of when your children are ready to discuss a particular topic.

Here are some tips that can guide your communication with your children now and help you prepare for what lies ahead.

- **Listen.** When you listen attentively and respectfully, your kids will feel more comfortable discussing difficult decisions with you.
- **Talking about issues like drug use and gambling** will be much easier if you practise discussing important subjects openly and honestly with them.
- **When you're making important decisions,** talk about how you are making the decision with your kids.
- **Relate appropriate experiences to them.** If you are trying to quit smoking or eliminate caffeine, let them know that you are trying; let them know that it's difficult.
- **Give your children opportunities to make choices** suitable to their age. Help them to accept consequences and learn from mistakes when things go wrong.
- **Notice opportunities to discuss** alcohol, other drugs and gambling. Help your children make sense out of what they see on television, in the news and in the community.
- **There are also other ways to influence** the choices your children make. One way is to focus on your children's strengths and interests and provide them with support in areas where they are weak. Recognize effort and improvement to help boost confidence.
- **Discuss rules with your children** and follow through on consequences.

When you do talk to your children:

- **Be specific and concrete.** When you talk about gambling, mention examples: buying a lottery ticket, betting on a sports event, playing bingo, etc.
- **Be clear about your own values,** but avoid sweeping statements (all drugs are bad) or threats (if I ever catch you betting money ...). Kids feel immortal, so scaring them doesn't work, and threats invite rebellion.
- **Emphasize balance and choice.** Facing choices about alcohol, other drugs and gambling can be a good way to practise making good decisions about many life issues.
- **If you have used illegal drugs in the past,** decide, before your kids ask, whether and how much you want to tell them. If you decide to tell them, your experience might help you to be specific and believable about drug use. You may also want to remind your kids that some things about drugs have changed. Marijuana and hash, for example, are usually many times stronger today than they were 20 or 30 years ago. Sharing needles can pass on HIV and other diseases such as hepatitis.

Keeping your kids informed is the best way to help them make good decisions.

### For more information

We understand that everyone's needs are different. Whether you want to prevent your child from using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or you want to help your child deal with a drug problem, we can help. Information and prevention programs, group and family counselling, outpatient and residential treatment, and the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs program are offered by Alberta Health Services and its funded services to help your child and your family.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

## Activity Page

### DRUG DECISIONS

This is an activity that teachers and counsellors have used to teach kids about using drugs wisely. They report that kids can really surprise you with what they come up with. Working with your child, fill in the second and third columns. One example is provided. Find several for each need. There are sample answers at the end.

NEED	NON-PRESCRIPTION DRUG	THING TO DO INSTEAD OF "DRUGGING"
1. to fall asleep	Nytol®	drink chamomile tea
2. to stay awake		
3. for nutrition		
4. for a headache		
5. for a fever		
6. for an upset stomach		
7. for travel sickness		
8. for a cold		
9. for a toothache		
10. for mosquito bites		

### SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

1. Drugs: Sleep-eze D®, Somnex®, Sedicin®. Alternatives: drink hot milk, listen to soothing music, read a book, listen to books on tape
2. Drugs: Wake-ups®, cup of coffee, cola drink. Alternatives: get enough rest, do mild exercise, change what you're doing, take a 15-minute nap to refresh yourself, do deep breathing exercises
3. Drugs: multivitamin supplements. Alternatives: eat a balanced diet, eat regular meals, follow Canada's Food Guide
4. Drugs: Anacin®, Excedrin®, Panadol®, Tylenol®, Aspirin®, Tempra®, Bufferin®. Alternatives: do deep breathing, relax, nap, massage your head and neck, get away from the cause of the headache (sun, noise, etc.)
5. Drugs: Anacin®, Excedrin®, Panadol®, Tylenol®, Aspirin®, Tempra®, Bufferin®. Alternatives: stay in bed and rest, keep warm, take cool baths, drink water

6. Drugs: Pepto-Bismol®, Maalox®, Eno®, Tums®, Diavol®, Mylanta®. Alternatives: lie down for a while, eat ginger, sip ginger ale
7. Drugs: Gravol®, Travel Tabs®. Alternatives: sit in the front seat, focus your eyes on the scenery ahead, try to sleep
8. Drugs: Actifed®, Dristan®, Benylin®, Contac C®, Dimetapp®, Triaminic®. Alternatives: rest until you feel better, take steamy baths, use a vaporizer, drink water
9. Drugs: Orajel®, Anbesol®. Alternatives: see a dentist, brush and floss to prevent
10. Drugs: Solarcaine®, calamine lotion. Alternatives: try not to scratch, apply baking soda paste, apply wrapped ice cubes

### GAMBLING QUIZ

Use the following questions to help your kids learn about gambling odds. You may want to explain to them that in all forms of organized gambling the “house” has to win, or no one would bother to hold bingo games or build casinos. This means that most people must lose most of the time, although the occasional person wins more than she or he loses. Anyone who wins and keeps playing is most likely to lose in the end.

1. What are the chances of getting a 3 when you throw one dice?
  - a. 1 in 3
  - b. 1 in 6
  - c. 1 in 4
  - d. 3 in 6
2. What are the chances of getting a pair of 3s when you throw two dice?
  - a. 1 in 3
  - b. 1 in 6
  - c. 1 in 36
  - d. 3 in 6
3. You take one dice and throw it three times. You get a 3 each time. What are the chances of getting a 3 when you throw it again?
  - a. 1 in 3
  - b. 1 in 6
  - c. 1 in 30
  - d. 100%
4. What are your chances of winning the million in Lotto 6/49?
  - a. 1 in 2 billion
  - b. 1 in 20
  - c. 1 in 14 million
  - d. 1 in 6
5. True or false? It’s illegal for kids under 18 to gamble in Alberta.
6. True or false? Some people win more than they lose.

7. True or false? Most people lose more than they win.
8. What proportion of adults in Alberta have a gambling problem?
  - a. 1 in 20 (5%)
  - b. 1 in 1000 (0.1%)
  - c. 1 in 5 (20%)
  - d. 1 in 300 (0.33%)

### ANSWERS

1. **b.** There is one 3 on a dice out of six faces, so the chance of each number is 1 in 6.
2. **c.** The math doesn’t matter so much as having your kid understand that the more conditions that have to be true, the less likely an event will happen. Here, getting just one 3 counts for nothing. A “win” is totally dependent on the other dice also reading 3.
3. **b.** Notice that the answer is the same as to question 1. That’s because each throw of the dice is completely independent of what happened before it. If you throw the dice 600 times, however, the total number of times 3 comes up should be about 100 times—1 in 6. You can’t use odds to predict any particular throw of the dice, just the approximate total when the dice is thrown many times.
4. **c.** This is why there is sometimes no winner, even though millions of tickets have been sold.
5. **Mostly true.** Kids can’t buy lottery tickets, go to casinos, bet on the races, play VLTs, etc. The only kind of organized gambling that you can do before age 18 is playing bingo, provided the prize is less than \$50.00.
6. **True.** Some people win and know how to quit when they’re ahead. A lot of people who get addicted to gambling win a lot in the beginning. They begin to believe that they are “special” somehow, that they are luckier than other people. They keep gambling and eventually begin to lose. This often causes them to start to bet more and more, trying to get back the money they lost. Gambling games are set up so that most people will lose more than they win, so that the “house” can make a profit.
7. **True.** See answer to number 6.
8. **a.**

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