

## Words Your Children Need to Hear from YOU... To Help them Stay Drug-Free

Most parents encourage, praise, cheer and compliment their children at every opportunity. A simple internet search of “Words Your Child Needs to Hear from You” gets more than 57 *million* results. What many parents don’t realize, however, is the significance of their words in building their children’s resiliency. Often parents have trouble even believing that their children are listening to them. Your words speak volumes.

You are the most influential protective factor in your children’s lives. What you say DOES matter and your children ARE listening...especially when it comes to the vital topic of drugs and alcohol. Research shows that children whose parents talk to them about drugs and alcohol are 40% less likely to use those substances. A recent survey of local high school students shows that 77% of those who choose not to drink, do so because they don’t want to disappoint their parents. This is why it’s so important for parents to have conversations with their children about drugs and alcohol. Sometimes the conversation isn’t even specifically about drugs or alcohol. It’s often about building protective factors like competence, confidence, connection, healthy coping strategies, effective time management and character that prepare adolescents to make healthy choices and successfully navigate adolescence.

Since the “Words Your Child Needs to Hear from You ...To Help Them Stay Drug-Free” isn’t a topic that is readily found or that comes naturally to most parents, this month’s Parenting Power Tips will get you started.

### Parenting Power Tips:

- \* **“You need to face the natural consequences of your actions.”** All of our decisions have consequences. Negative consequences are painful, but they help to teach us valuable lessons. When we protect our children from the natural, sometimes painful consequences of their actions, we don’t allow them to learn those valuable lessons.
- \* **“Try to solve that problem/conflict on our own.”** Life is filled with challenges. As parents, we want to step in and protect our children from those difficulties. When we do that, we don’t allow our children to develop the coping skills they need to deal with adversity and that can cause anxiety. Let your child know you are there to support him, but that he needs to begin to learn those necessary problem solving skills so he can use them in the future.
- \* **“It’s ok to fail sometimes.”** We live in a stressful time. Our children often feel the need to be perfect in all that they attempt. But sometimes, life’s most important lessons are learned when we fail. Don’t take those opportunities away from your child. When they attempt something that doesn’t end in perfection, applaud the attempt and use the experience to grow stronger.
- \* **“I don’t expect you to be THE best, I want you to be YOUR best.”** Everyone can’t be first—and that’s OK. Everyone has different strengths and makes different contributions to this world. In order to find their strengths, adolescents need to find what THEY are good at. It might not be the thing that is recognized on report cards or at awards assemblies, but it is the thing that will lead them to a happy successful future. Your child is unique and important, they don’t have to be like anyone else.
- \* **“You cannot drink or do drugs.”** Parents (and all adults in the home) need to send a clear message to their children that alcohol and drug use is not ok. It’s illegal for them and dangerous to their developing brains. Ambiguous or vague messages about use lead to confusion or uncertainty in adolescents and can increase their risk of using those substances.
- \* **“You need to get 8-9 hours of sleep every night.”** Fatigue leads to stress, anxiety, impulsivity and the inability to learn. Doctors recommend that adolescents get *8-9 hours of sleep each night* to be able to succeed academically and manage stress and anxiety effectively. This can be difficult, but it can be done.
- \* **“It’s ok to say no to some activities.”** Our children have so many incredible opportunities. It can be stressful and overwhelming to take advantage of all of them. It is our job as parents to teach our children how to manage their time and say “no” to some of those activities. Learning to say “no” is a valuable life skill that will help your child manage stress, avoid overscheduling and develop effective time management skills.
- \* **“You can’t....”** There will be times that you make an important decision that your child thinks is unfair. Adolescents can be persistent and persuasive. Remember that YOU ARE THE PARENT. You have more life experience and that very important “gut feeling” about certain situations. It is your responsibility to keep your child safe. Sometimes that means saying “no” to something they really want or someplace they want to go. Your child needs to know you will provide secure and firm boundaries for them, even when they don’t think they need them.
- \* **Parents speak loudest not with words, but with actions. Your children are learning how to live life by watching you. Are you modeling the kind of life you want them to live?**

### Conversations that Count

Individuals who are effective communicators are better able to make decisions consistent with their goals and develop healthy relationships. This month’s [PowerTalk](#) allows your child to [interview](#) you while building his/her communication skills.