

How to Talk About Vaping

It's become a childhood health crisis: About 5 million middle and high school students say they have used e-cigarettes in the past month, per the CDC. Packaged as trendy, high-tech devices that resemble pens or USB drives with kid-pleasing flavors such as chocolate, fruit, and gummy bear, vapes are hooking a new generation on nicotine. Here's what you need to know to protect your child.

BY ARRICCA ELIN SANSONE

When is my child old enough to discuss vaping?

It's probably not too soon. "Start before middle school. Many e-cigarette products have such high nicotine levels that kids can show signs of addiction after only a few weeks of use," says Susan Walley, M.D., chair of the section on tobacco control at the American Academy of Pediatrics. One of the most common reasons kids start is that they have a family member or friend who vapes, but nearly a quarter are drawn in by the flavors. Vaping companies have worked hard to push their products too, via social media, teen "influencers," celebrity endorsements, and entertainment websites with ads targeted toward kids. Even if you think vaping isn't part of your child's life, it may be—so it's worth a conversation.

What should I say?

Educate yourself first (see box) so you can answer questions and debunk myths. "Start by assessing what they know," says Joseph Schwab, M.D., an associate professor in the department of pediatrics at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. "Ask, 'What do you think about vaping? Do any of your friends do it? Have you tried it?' Get a discussion going, rather than a lecture. It shouldn't be one sit-down and you're done." When opportunities arise—say, you pass a vape shop or see someone vaping—talk about why you don't want your child to start. Remind him or her that these products damage lungs and developing brains and that the mist created isn't water vapor, but aerosolized nicotine and other harmful chemicals.

What if my child has already started?

It's natural to get upset, but be proactive. "Have your freak-out moment, then gather your thoughts and, in a nonjudgmental way, say something like, 'Let's find the resources to help you quit,'" says Panagis Galiatsatos, M.D., director of the Tobacco Treatment Clinic at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center and American Lung Association national spokesperson. "Get your child's doctor involved to see if there are immediate health issues that need to be addressed. Then he or she can individualize a treatment plan for your child. It's not something you and your child can do alone."

WHERE TO GET THE FACTS

- 1 CDC:** cdc.gov
- 2 American Lung Association:** lung.org
- 3 Truth Initiative:** truthinitiative.org
- 4 Surgeon General:** e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov