

What if you discover your child is vaping?

Finding out that your child is vaping can be confronting for many parents. It's never going to be easy, no matter how hard you try to prepare yourself, to discover that your child may be experimenting with alcohol or other drugs. Vaping is a new phenomenon that most parents know little about and that lack of knowledge can make the situation feel even more overwhelming.

How a parent discovers that their child is vaping can also play a major role in how they respond to the issue. You are likely to react very differently if you receive a phone call from the school informing you that your child has been suspended after being caught vaping in the bathroom, compared to simply finding a suspicious device in their pocket when you're doing the family washing.

Regardless of the situation, before responding it is vital that you give yourself some time to calm down and be as prepared as possible. Remember these four simple steps in the preparation process:

- **know the facts and be as informed as possible** – take the time to collect some basic information, ensuring you access it from different sources. Collecting your facts from one website that pushes a particular viewpoint is not going to be helpful
- **remember what it was like to be a teen** – this can be tough but think back as to what didn't work when your parents tried to have 'the talk' with you – what should you be avoiding?
- **practice what you want to say** – you want to have a conversation, not to lecture or to fight. Writing down some dot points to keep you on track can be helpful but don't read from a script
- **find the right time and place** – choose a time that works well for all of you and ensure you have a place where you won't be disturbed and you both feel comfortable

What should you say?

There is no perfect way to approach this conversation that is going to work for all parents and their teens. Every family is different and what may work well for one of your children may not be as effective when talking with another. Most importantly, parents should be honest and open, without passing judgment, in their discussions with their child when it comes to any alcohol and other drug issue.

With that in mind, and in an effort to keep the conversation as positive as possible, the following steps could be useful:

- **ask for their perspective on vaping** – you want to know it all, what's their side of the story? Why did they vape or continuing to vape? When your teen says "You just don't understand", in this case that's absolutely true. It's important that you let them speak, don't interrupt or make comment, this is their time – you want to know it all
- once they've finished – **express your views about teen vaping and why you feel that way.** Ensure that they allow you the time to speak without interruption or comment. What you say needs to be well thought through and stick to what you've planned. It'll be tempting to respond to comments they've just made but this is not the time – use the information you've collected to support your view on the issue
- **avoid judgment and the use of 'scare tactics'** – if they've talked about their friends vaping as one of the reasons they're doing it be careful not to criticise them (remember, that didn't go down well when you were a teen!). Most importantly, don't throw horror stories at them that you've seen reported in the media. Most of these are based on some degree of truth but they're not the norm and young people know that – stick to a couple of concerns based on the facts

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- **clearly state your family expectations on vaping.** You do have an influence on your child, no matter what their age. Does this mean that they're going to do everything you tell them to do? Of course not, but letting them know how disappointed you would be if they continued to vape can be effective. This is the time where you can clearly state a family rule or boundary around vaping such as "As much as I would love to be able to stop you vaping, I can't control what you do when I'm not with you. I can control what is done in our home. No vaping devices are permitted in this house ..."
- once you've finished, **allow them time to respond to what you've said and any of the rules or boundaries you've outlined.** This will likely be the time where they will try to bamboozle you with statements like "But it's safer than smoking" but keep calm and composed. Getting angry and frustrated isn't going to help. Once again, let them say their piece and, if you've done your homework you may be able to respond without too many problems but I guarantee there will be times, particularly around vaping, when you'll reach a stalemate
- if you get to a point where you've got different information on the same issue, e.g., "It's just water vapour", **offer to learn together and look at each other's sources.** Ask them to provide their reference and you can show them what you have found. Sitting at a computer together provides a valuable learning opportunity for both parties and demonstrates that you're willing to listen to what they have to say and hopefully teaches them that they should be willing to show the same respect to others