



RIGHT DECISIONS

**BE
NICOTINE
FREE**

RIGHT NOW

Family Conversations to:

Help Your Child Be **TOBACCO AND NICOTINE FREE**



INSIDE

- ▶ Facing adolescence
- ▶ Why and when adolescents try tobacco and nicotine
- ▶ Tips for talking about the topic
- ▶ Peer pressure and how to help

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www.RightDecisionsRightNow.com





Facing Adolescence

You may notice that the young person in your life wants more privacy, is placing more importance on being with friends than family, is concerned about image and “fitting in,” or is curious about experimenting with risky behaviors – like trying tobacco and nicotine products or alcohol.

While all children are different, middle-schoolers frequently exhibit these behaviors as they go through adolescence. It’s part of the process and to be expected, but it can also be challenging – for you and the young person.

As your youngster becomes more independent, they will benefit from knowing how to make good decisions, including the decision to be tobacco and nicotine free. You can help. You may wish to start by asking yourself these questions:

- Does the young person in my family know what I think about important topics and decisions she/he may face?
- Given what I know now, is it likely that my youngster will make the right decisions?

While some young people may not admit it, they still want guidance from their parents and adult family members as they move through adolescence, and they need to know your expectations.



THE BIG PICTURE

This booklet is for parents, guardians, grandparents, and adult family members who provide regular care and guidance to a young person. The goal of this booklet is to provide some extra help when you broach the subject of tobacco and nicotine use with your young person. It includes:

- information from research about why and when some adolescents try or use tobacco and nicotine
- facts about tobacco and nicotine use you can share
- steps you can take to help the young person in your life be nicotine free
- tips for talking about the topic
- suggestions to help young people deal with peer pressure

If you’re not the young person’s parent, guardian, or primary care-giver, but you provide regular care and guidance to them, first talk to the primary caregiver(s) to decide how to approach this subject with the young person.

Use this booklet to keep the conversation going and help the young people in your life make the decision to be tobacco and nicotine free now and in the future. The Right Decisions Right Now program was initially developed by Lifetime Learning Systems, Inc. and was funded by R.J. Reynolds.

Visit www.RightDecisionsRightNow.com for additional resources and ideas about how to help the young person in your life be tobacco and nicotine free.

Why It's Important

Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹ You may have already begun talking with your youngster about not using nicotine products, including cigarettes, vapes, nicotine pouches or and smokeless tobacco. Keep talking! Your child is at greater risk now: research indicates young people are most likely to try smoking for the first time between the ages of 11 and 15, or grades 6 to 10.² If you're the young person's parent and a smoker, he or she has a higher chance of becoming one, too.² Now could be a great time to quit – it could help you and your youngster.

Here's a fact: Young people are more likely to be tobacco and nicotine free if they know their parents don't want them using it and would be disappointed if they did. *This is true even if their parents use tobacco or nicotine.*³ Other adult family members play an important role, too, especially those who regularly provide care and guidance for the young person.

Don't wait for your youngster to initiate the conversation, and don't expect that they'll tell you that your opinion makes a difference. Think about how you may have talked – or not talked – to your parent, guardian, or trusted adult family member about tobacco and nicotine use when you were an adolescent. Keep this in mind as you broach the topic.





YOUTH AND TOBACCO AND NICOTINE USE

The good news: Most young people don't use tobacco or nicotine products. But some adolescents are curious and think about it. Some try it and then stop. Others become regular, daily users and are addicted.

Understanding what influences their decisions might help you when you talk to your young person.

Why Most Young People Say "No" To Tobacco and Nicotine

For most adolescents, it's an easy decision – they've made a personal commitment to be nicotine free. Why else do young people say "no"? Some reasons include:^{4, 14}

- knowing their parents disapprove
- concerns about the health risks, which range from not being able to breathe well enough to play sports to cancer and strokes
- having friends who are tobacco and nicotine free
- knowing how to say "no"

Why Some Adolescents Try Or Use Tobacco or Nicotine Products

Government sources point to many reasons young people try tobacco and nicotine or start using it regularly, including:^{2,4,5}

- having parents, friends, peers, or siblings who use it
- overestimating the number of people who use tobacco or nicotine products
- linking smoking or vaping with a particular social image or being "grown-up"
- wanting to bond with peers who use nicotine products, or thinking it's a way to get a particular group to like them
- having low self-esteem
- not knowing how to say "no" if friends offer them tobacco or nicotine
- not doing well in school, or not being involved with school activities
- underestimating the health consequences of tobacco and nicotine use
- not understanding addiction and how tough it is to quit
- lacking parental support as they face the challenges of growing up
- accessibility, availability, and price of these products
- exposure to product advertising

CDC FACTS & FIGURES

About Middle & High School Tobacco and Nicotine Use In The U.S.



Nearly 9 out of 10 adults who smoke cigarettes daily first try smoking by age 18.⁶

In 2023, more than 6 of every 100 middle school students (6.6%) and about 1 of every 8 high school students (12.6%) reported current use of a tobacco product.⁶

In 2023, about 1 out of every 22 middle school students (4.6%) reported that they had used electronic cigarettes in the past 30 days.⁶

In 2023, about 1 of every 100 high school students (1.7%) reported using nicotine pouches in the past 30 days.⁶

Do You Use Tobacco or Nicotine Products?

Talking to the young person in your life may be more of a challenge if you use either tobacco or nicotine products. Even so, you can tell them not to use them. Be honest if you're asked why you use it. Just make sure your youngster knows that you don't think he or she should use tobacco or nicotine.

If you've tried to stop, explain the circumstances and let your youngster know that many people think they can stop whenever they want to, but actually quitting is much harder than it may seem. Then let your young person know that this is one of the best reasons to never start using tobacco or nicotine products.

If you wish you had never started, say so and explain why. Talk about health concerns and consequences you've experienced. Tell your young person what you think smoking, vaping or using smokeless tobacco has cost you (financially and in other ways). You may even consider asking him or her for suggestions to help you quit.





You've Got Influence — Use It!

You can help the young person in your family be tobacco and nicotine free by:

- setting clear expectations
- being a good example or role model
- teaching him or her the facts about tobacco and nicotine use and how to say "no"

Whether you're the young person's primary caregiver or an adult family member providing guidance and support, your words can make a difference. If you're not the primary caregiver, be sure to talk with the primary caregiver(s) about discussing tobacco and nicotine use with the young person and what sorts of messages you want to convey.

Setting Clear Expectations

When adolescents know their parents don't want them to use nicotine products, they're less likely to do it. Let them know! Adult family members providing care and guidance for a young person are also in a position to take a stand.

- State your expectations. Tell your youngster you don't want them to use tobacco and you'll be disappointed if she/he does. Let them know why.
- Be clear and precise. Your adolescent may know what you think about tobacco and nicotine use, but be sure he or she knows how much you disapprove of them using it.
- Make sure your young person listens and hears you. This might sound obvious, but consider this: *A March 2008 study reported that 96% of middle-school parents surveyed discussed tobacco use with their 5th to 9th graders.⁷ But only 84% of the children surveyed said their parents talked to them!*
- Make sure your message is getting through loud and clear. And keep this survey result in mind: *Almost all of the middle-schoolers surveyed were glad their parents discussed smoking with them.⁷*
- Establish consequences. Let your youngster know what will happen if he or she uses tobacco or nicotine, and why you chose the consequences.

Visit www.RightDecisionsRightNow.com for additional resources and ideas about how to help the young person in your life be nicotine free.

GENERALLY SPEAKING

You may have noticed that your youngster is becoming more self-conscious about appearance, mannerisms, clothing, and more. Even if your young person isn't expressing it outwardly, it's possible that they feel somewhat awkward or unsure about themselves. Help your young person feel good about themselves and do what you can to boost their self-esteem.

When appropriate, genuinely compliment your youngster about the characteristics and behaviors you admire, such as success in a particular class or sport, a new hairstyle, or helping around the house. What seems like an insignificant comment to you may make a big difference to your youngster – and helping them build self-confidence may also help them say “no” to tobacco and nicotine.

Set An Example

Experts agree that there are a lot of ways you can set an example for the young person in your life.

- If you don't use tobacco or nicotine, don't start.
- If you do use it, quit. It's challenging, but it's a great way to show your youngster what you expect. When parents quit smoking or vaping or using smokeless tobacco, their children are less likely to start.⁸
- Maintain a smoke-free home and car – even if you smoke. Children are less likely to smoke if they grow up in a smoke-free home.⁹
- Practice healthy behaviors, like exercising, eating well-balanced meals, and getting plenty of sleep.



Share The Facts

You have your youngster's attention and you're ready to talk. How are you going to make it clear that you don't want them to use tobacco or nicotine? "Because I said so" is generally not enough. Back up your stance with facts to help your young person understand why you want him or her to be nicotine free.



Tips For Talking

Constructive, respectful, quality communication – that's what you should aim for. Research suggests it lowers the chance that children will experiment with tobacco.⁹ The following tips may also help you and your adolescent have a successful discussion:

- Take cues from them to figure out when it's a good time to talk. Try talking while you're doing something relaxing that you both enjoy, like playing ball or cooking.
- Be sure you have your young person's attention. Turn off the TV and put away devices such as mobile phones and tablets so they know the conversation is important.
- Ask your youngster if they have talked with another family member about tobacco or nicotine use. If so, ask what they learned from the conversation and how they feel about it.
- Don't lecture. The discussion should allow time and space for your youngster to express their opinion and ask questions.
- Ask your adolescent what they have learned in school about tobacco and nicotine.
- Ask your youngster why they think some young people try and use tobacco and nicotine products.
- Listen and indicate respect for their opinions and feelings. Show you're listening by asking follow-up questions.
- Comment on things your youngster does well on and on good decisions they have made. Encourage them to keep making healthy decisions, like being tobacco and nicotine free.
- Let your youngster know you're available if they want to talk, especially if they feel pressured by peers to use tobacco or nicotine or engage in other activities.

Myth VS. Reality

Adolescents think the number of young people (and adults) who use tobacco is higher than it is.² This misperception is one reason some young people start smoking.²

According to the CDC, here are some numbers that might help your youngster get the big picture:

- More than 98% of middle-schoolers DO NOT smoke cigarettes.⁶

- More than 95% of middle-schoolers DO NOT use electronic cigarettes.⁶
- More than 99% of middle-school students DO NOT use smokeless tobacco.⁶
- More than 88% of the adults in the U.S. DO NOT smoke cigarettes.¹⁰

Go online together to www.RightDecisionsRightNow.com to read through the "Myth or Reality" poster. It may help your young person better understand what's real and what's not when it comes to tobacco and nicotine.

BEING YOUNG DOESN'T PREVENT

Health Consequences

Your young person may already know about some of the health consequences related to smoking cigarettes, like stroke, heart disease, cancer, and gum disease.¹¹ Ask them to tell you about health consequences they are aware of. Then ask:

- Do you think these issues only affect older people who've used tobacco or nicotine for a long time?

Tell your adolescent that it's not just older people who are affected by using tobacco and nicotine products. Research shows that young people can be affected, too – and it can happen immediately:

- Adolescents who smoke can experience shortness of breath, phlegm production, coughing, and wheezing.⁴
- Young people who smoke are likely to be less physically fit than non-smokers.⁴

- Teen smokers are more likely than their nicotine-free friends to have panic attacks, anxiety disorders, and depression.⁶
- No tobacco product has been shown to be safe. Smokeless tobacco can cause cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, and esophagus.

Remind your youngster that smoking can impact their stamina. This could lead to poor performance on the playing field or difficulty just doing everyday things, like walking around or going up and down stairs. Encourage your child to be tobacco and nicotine free to avoid the health consequences and the possibility of letting down teammates, friends, and you.

Nicotine Addiction

Most young people don't really understand nicotine addiction. They think people can quit whenever they want. But the Surgeon General's Report indicates "most young people who smoke regularly are already addicted to nicotine."⁴ When they try to quit, they experience withdrawal symptoms similar to adults.⁴ Smokeless tobacco use is also as addictive for young people as it is for adults.⁴

What are the withdrawal symptoms? When people who are addicted to nicotine stop smoking, they may suffer from restlessness, hunger, depression, headaches, and other uncomfortable feelings, according to research.¹⁴ Ask your adolescent: What do you think it would be like to live with these problems? Then, if you smoke or used to smoke and have quit or tried quitting, explain what it felt like.





It's Not Cool

Research shows some young people think smoking or vaping looks cool or will help them fit in or look more grown-up. This perception seems to get stronger from 5th to 9th grade, and it influences some young people to try tobacco or nicotine products.

Ask your young person if they think it seems cool to use tobacco or smoke cigarettes. Then, let your young person know what most other kids his or her age think:

A survey of 1,540 students in 5th to 9th grade across the country had the following results:¹⁵

- Do you think smoking cigarettes makes young people look cool or fit in? 88% said NO
- Do you think smoking cigarettes is cool? 91% said NO
- Do you think smoking cigarettes makes people look grown-up? 82% said NO
- Do you think smoking cigarettes looks fun? 90% said NO
- Do you think characters portrayed in the movies look cooler when they smoke cigarettes or when they don't smoke? 44% think smoking makes movie actors look LESS cool; 45% think it doesn't make a difference

It may be helpful for you and your youngster to watch video examples of situations about peer pressure and tobacco and nicotine use.

Visit www.RightDecisionsRightNow.com/resources/videos/ to select an age-appropriate video to watch together.

Common Misperceptions

If your youngster thinks there may be benefits to using tobacco or nicotine, you can help dispel these myths and misperceptions. Try using some of these questions and statements.

- Find out what your young person thinks is "cool." Say, "Things are different than when I was your age. If someone asked you what's 'cool,' what would you say? What do you do that's cool? What do you see other people doing that looks cool to you?" If your youngster mentions something healthy, recognize and praise that thing. If not, just listen respectfully.
- Some young people glamorize smoking or vaping because of what they see in the media. If you see an image of a celebrity/athlete using tobacco or nicotine, ask your young person, "Why do you think they use tobacco? What do you think about that? What do you like most about this person? What do you dislike?" Encourage your adolescent to see that the positive characteristics they like about the celebrity/athlete make the person interesting. Using tobacco or nicotine doesn't make the person interesting – it makes the person less healthy.
- If you're with your youngster and see adolescents using tobacco or nicotine, or if you see an image on social media of one of their peers using tobacco or nicotine, ask, "Why do you think some kids use tobacco?" If your youngster thinks adolescents use tobacco or nicotine to look cool, ask, "Do you think it looks cool? What about the health consequences? What else could someone do that's cool but isn't unhealthy?"

Pressure From Peers

As adolescents get older, friends become more important. They start to play a significant role in decision making. Peers can be a big influence when it comes to nicotine use. Some adolescents may be pressured into trying it, or they may feel like they have to use it to fit in. Others don't know how to say "no" when their friends offer them tobacco or nicotine products. And the more friends a child has who use it, the greater the chances are that he or she will join them.¹⁷

Get to know your child's friends, both offline and online. Monitor their social media accounts.

Remind your youngster that even if their peers use tobacco and nicotine, they can and should decide not to. Then, come up with some ways your youngster might say "no" to peer pressure. One idea: if they are in an uncomfortable situation and feels pressured to use tobacco, encourage them to text you – maybe you can come up with a code word together – to let you know. You may decide that in this situation you'll call your youngster; text them to say he or she needs to come home; or something similar. The idea is to provide an "easy out" for your young person to help them get out of the uncomfortable situation.

Need some more ideas?

Visit www.RightDecisionsRightNow.com to download an activity created especially for parents, guardians, grandparents, and adult care providers to use with their youngsters.



If Your Adolescent Is Concerned About Image

Remind him or her that tobacco use can cause stained teeth, bad breath, cracked lips, and smelly hair and clothes.¹ Ask: How would these things affect your image?

How To Say “No”

Help your young person say “no” to tobacco and nicotine by practicing these refusal tips and suggested responses, or brainstorm ideas together. Let them know that these refusal tips also work in other situations when it’s time to say “no.”

Often, a friendly but firm “No, thanks” is enough. If it’s not, say “no” and...

- suggest something else. (Not interested. Let’s get some-thing to eat.)
- talk about the consequences. (No thanks. Using tobacco makes your teeth look gross.)
- give a reason or explain why you said “no.” (Nope. I don’t want to be short of breath for tomorrow’s soccer game.)
- reverse the pressure. (No thanks. Why do you even want to smoke/vape/dip? It’s nasty.)
- change the subject. (No thanks. Let me show you this app I just downloaded.)
- add some humor. (If my parents found out, I’d be in serious trouble.)
- walk away. (No thanks.)

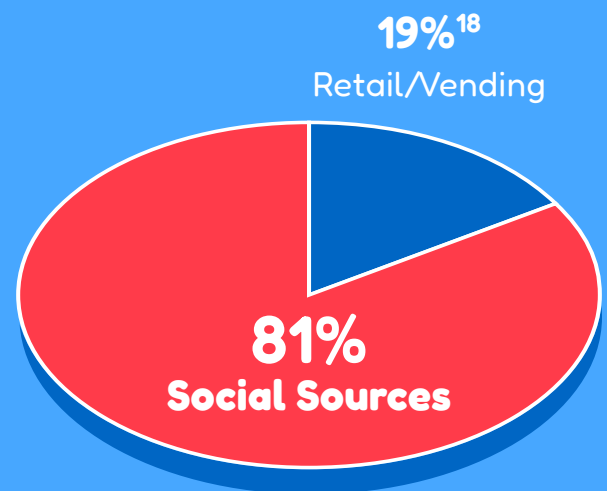
You can even suggest your youngster say “no” and blame you. (No thanks. My parents would smell smoke on me from a mile away, and I’d be in serious trouble.)

Visit www.RightDecisionsRightNow.com/resources/posters/ to download posters about how to say “no.”

Breaking The Law

It’s illegal to sell tobacco and nicotine products to minors in every state. In many places, young people can be fined for just having these products – they don’t have to be using them to break the law. Help your youngster understand these legal consequences and what they mean.

More Can And Should Be Done



According to the CDC, only 19% of the students who currently smoke obtained their own cigarettes by buying them in a store or from a vending machine.¹⁸

The prevalence (about 81%) of students who smoked obtained cigarettes through social sources.

- Usually an adult, person 18+
- Borrowed or bummed
- Bought by someone else

Supporting Quitters

Adolescents who use tobacco and nicotine have a hard time quitting – just like adults. If your young person uses tobacco or nicotine and wants to quit, support the decision. Speak to your healthcare professional, the school nurse, or their guidance counselor to learn about local resources available and strategies you can use, such as:²⁵

- helping them stay busy
- encouraging them to stay clear of places where smoking or vaping takes place

- reminding them to drink lots of water, eat healthy meals regularly, and keep active
- keeping a tobacco and nicotine-free home
- being there if they want to talk

If you use nicotine products, consider quitting together. Make a plan to help each other quit. You might even engage your youngster in a nightly walk or run so that they can feel the benefits of quitting.

Nicotine Addiction

As your adolescent gets older, they may have more friends who use tobacco or nicotine. Keep the communication lines open so you can continue to be a positive influence by setting expectations, expressing your disapproval of tobacco and nicotine use, talking about the health consequences, and being involved.⁴

Periodically talk with your youngster about not using tobacco while they are in grades 5 through 9 and beyond. You may get a tired “I know, I know” as a response, but remember that your words can make a difference and help your young person be and stay tobacco and nicotine free.



Visit www.RightDecisionsRightNow.com for additional resources and ideas about how to help your adolescent be tobacco and nicotine free.

Footnotes And Resources

There are additional organizations and resources that can provide information on these and other lifestyle behaviors. The listing in this booklet does not imply that the organization endorses the information contained herein, nor does it constitute an endorsement of the organization or resources by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.

¹ CDC, Health Effects of cigarette Smoking https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/effects_cig_smoking/index.htm#smoking-death

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Reducing Tobacco Use: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2000. Chapter Three. Referenced 2024. Surgeon General's Reports on Smoking and Tobacco Use ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov))

³ Chassin, L., Presson, C., Rose, J., Sherman, S. J., & Probst, J. (2002). Parental smoking cessation and adolescent smoking. *J Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, vol. 27(6), pp. 485-96. Referenced 2024 <https://academic.oup.com/jpepsy/article/27/6/485/918282>

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Young People: A Report of the Surgeon General*. 2012. Referenced 2024. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK99237/>

⁵ CDC, Youth and Tobacco Use | Smoking and Tobacco Use https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use/index.htm

⁶ CDC, Smoking & Tobacco Use. *Fact Sheet – Youth and Tobacco Use*: Referenced 2024. www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use.

⁷ A study of 534 parents of 5th to 9th grade students, and 1,104 children in 5th to 9th grade conducted by Lifetime Learning Systems Research in March 2008. The margin of error for this particular set of data is ± 2.5 percentage points.

⁸ Farkas, A., Distefano, J.M., Choi, W.S., Gilpin, E.A. & Pierce, J.P. (1999). Does parental smoking cessation discourage adolescent smoking? *Preventive Medicine*, vol. 28(3), pp. 213-18.

⁹ Harakeh, Z., Scholte, R.H.J., de Vries, H., & Engels, R.C.M.E. (2005). Parental rules and communication: their association with adolescent smoking. *Addiction*, vol. 100(6), pp. 862-70.

¹⁰ CDC, Smoking & Tobacco Use. Adult Data. *Current Cigarette Smoking Among Adults – United States, 2014*. Referenced 2024 http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/adult_data/cig_smoking/.

¹¹ CDC, Health Effects of Cigarette Smoking https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/effects_cig_smoking/index.htm#smoking-death

¹³ Smokeless Tobacco: Health Effects | CDC https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/smokeless/health_effects/index.htm

¹⁴ CDC, What You Can Do to Protect Youth From the Harms of Vaping. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/features/back-to-school/index.html>

¹⁵ A study of 1,540 5th to 9th grade students conducted by Lifetime Learning Systems Research, Inc. in December 2007. The margin of error for this particular set of data is ± 2.5 percentage points.

¹⁷ Mayhew, K., Flay, B., & Mott, J. (2000). Stages in the development of adolescent smoking. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, vol. 59, Suppl. 1, pp. S61-S81.

¹⁸ CDC, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2013*. Rep. no. 4. N.p., 13 June 2014. Web. 16 Nov. 2014. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6304.pdf>.

¹⁹ The New York Times: Business Day: *The New Smoke, "E-Cigarettes, by Other Names, Lure Young and Worry Experts."* by Matt Richtel, March 4, 2014. <http://nyti.ms/1f40uct>

²² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Reducing Tobacco Use: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2000. Chapter Three. Referenced 2024. www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2000/complete_report/pdfs/chapter3.pdf

²⁵ CDC, *I Quit! What To Do When You're Sick of Smoking, Chewing or Dipping*. Referenced 2024. www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/iquit



