



RIGHT DECISIONS

**BE
NICOTINE
FREE**

RIGHT NOW



Facts about tobacco and nicotine use among adolescents and tips to encourage your child to be tobacco and nicotine free.

**Parents and
Guardians**

Parents and Guardians,

Your child is participating in a school-based youth nicotine prevention program entitled **Right Decisions Right Now: Be Nicotine Free**, developed by Lifetime Learning Systems, Inc.; updated and adapted to a digital format by BKFK; references and footnotes updated by Young Minds Inspired (YMI); funded by R.J. Reynolds. The goal of the program is to help prevent tobacco and nicotine use among adolescents and have them remain tobacco and nicotine free for life. In 2023, the program was updated and reviewed to ensure the content reflects evolving trends in youth tobacco and nicotine use. Youth smoking rates among middle and high school students have declined over the past decade, but e-cigarette use is on the rise.¹ According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), children who report following a family calendar, eating meals together, and talking with their families, are less likely to smoke.¹ By communicating regularly with your child about the consequences of tobacco and nicotine use, you can positively impact their decision to be tobacco and nicotine free. Tell your child that you don't want them to use tobacco or nicotine—take a stand. Find opportunities that will allow you to have an ongoing dialogue on the topic so your child will remain tobacco nicotine free.

Middle school means changes for both you and your child. Your child is experiencing new things and making more decisions independently. One decision your child may be thinking about is whether or not to try nicotine products such as vapes, smokeless tobacco or nicotine pouches. E-cigarettes are now the most commonly used tobacco product among U.S. middle and high school students. In 2022, about 1 in 10 U.S. middle and high school students had reported using e-cigarettes at least once in the past 30 days, including 3.3% of middle school students and 14.1% of high school students.¹



To combat peer pressure and help your child make better, more informed decisions, this youth nicotine prevention program includes activities to enhance decision-making and refusal skills, along with lessons about the health consequences caused by tobacco and nicotine use.

This guide provides information about tobacco and nicotine use among adolescents that you can use during your discussions. Talk to your child about what they've learned in class. You will also find a chart with information about some of the developmental stages middle schoolers experience and tips you may find useful as you help your child navigate the middle school years. □

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TOBACCO AND NICOTINE USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS:

- Nearly 9 out of 10 adults who smoke cigarettes daily first try smoking by age 18.
- About 1% of middle schoolers are current cigarette smokers.³ That number rises to 2% in high school.³ Approximately 5% of middle school students vape and that rises to 10% for high school students.³
- Health risks can be immediate, affecting the child's breathing⁴, for example.
- Nicotine is often the first drug used by young people who use alcohol and other drugs.⁴
- Since nicotine addiction can occur during adolescence, young tobacco users are likely to become adult tobacco users.²
- Young people have just as hard a time quitting smoking as adults. Most young people who smoke indicate they would like to quit, and have made numerous, usually unsuccessful attempts to do so.²

The educational resources listed or linked to in this publication are provided as a convenience. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (RJRT) is not responsible for the content of those materials. The statements and views in those materials do not necessarily represent the views of RJRT or its management.

¹ HHS. *Talking With Teens About Tobacco: How You Make a Difference*. Referenced 2024. www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-training/for-families/tobacco/make-a-difference/index.html

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health; Washington, D.C., 2012. Referenced 2024. Tobacco Reports And Publications | HHS.gov

PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

WHY MOST ADOLESCENTS DON'T USE TOBACCO AND NICOTINE

The majority of your people don't smoke cigarettes, vape, or use nicotine products. Aside from a personal commitment to be tobacco and nicotine free, what influences young people to abstain or stop using tobacco?⁵

- strong parental support not to use tobacco or nicotine products
- the health risks
- having friends who are tobacco and nicotine free
- the difficulty of obtaining tobacco and nicotine products
- the cost of tobacco and nicotine products
- school programs that teach them to identify social influences of tobacco and nicotine use and provide refusal skills

With this information, you can positively influence your child's decision to be tobacco and nicotine free by:⁵

- letting your child know you disapprove of him or her using tobacco or any nicotine products
- being involved in your child's free time
- talking with your child about the health consequences of tobacco and nicotine use
- encouraging academic achievement and school

WHAT PROMPTS ADOLESCENTS TO EXPERIMENT WITH OR REGULARLY USE TOBACCO AND NICOTINE PRODUCTS?

In middle school, adolescents experience a lot of changes and challenges. Friends become an ever-increasing and powerful influence, and, as a result, adolescents might face peer pressure to try new things. Or, they may put pressure on themselves to engage in risk behaviors like experimenting with tobacco, vaping or using alcohol because they think such behaviors will help them "fit in." Some common factors that may influence young people to use substances include:

- having friends, peers, or parents who use substances⁶
- overestimating the number of people who smoke or vape⁶
- linking smoking or vaping with a "positive" social image and bonding with a peer group⁶
- perceiving tobacco or nicotine use as a transition to adulthood⁶
- having low levels of academic achievement⁵
- having low self-esteem or low self-image⁵
- lacking skills to resist influences to use tobacco or nicotine products⁵

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT TOBACCO AND NICOTINE

The more you talk with your child about a wide range of issues—schoolwork, friends, sports, TV shows, etc.—the easier it is to talk about specific topics such as tobacco and nicotine. The most important thing you can do for your child is keep the lines of communication open. Talk to them on a regular basis. If your child is not approaching you with questions about sensitive topics like vaping, take the initiative and start the conversation. Here are some ways you could bring up the topic:

- Say, "I understand you've been talking in school about peer pressure and the health consequences of nicotine use. Tell me about some of the things you've learned."
- If you see smoking portrayed in the media, say, "I wonder why the director had that one guy start vaping in the last scene. What do you think?"
- If you and your child see a young person vaping, use it as an opening by saying something like, "How much nicotine use are you seeing in your school? I wonder if it's the same as when I was your age."

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU TALK WITH YOUR CHILD.

- Talk with your child, don't lecture—children respond more favorably to discussions than to lectures.
- In general conversation, emphasize all the things your child does well—especially things like taking care of their health—rather than the things they don't do well.
- Demonstrate respect for your child's opinions. Show that you're listening. Ask follow-up questions.

What to talk about

- Talk about the health consequences of smoking, such as cancer; shortness of breath; emphysema; stroke; etc. Vaping or using nicotine in adolescence can harm the parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood, and impulse control. For more information, visit [1 - Health Effects of Cigarette Smoking | CDC](#) [2 - Quick Facts on the Risks of E-cigarettes for Kids, Teens, and Young Adults | CDC](#)
- Ask your child what they think about tobacco and nicotine to help guide the conversation.
- Tell your child that if someone offers them a nicotine product and they feel pressure to use it, they can always refuse by putting the blame on you ("I know my parents; they'll find out and then they'll ground me for life.")
- Children want moral guidance. Communicate your values to your child and be sure they know where you stand when it comes to tobacco use.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Young People: 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, 1994. Referenced 2024. Tobacco Reports And Publications |

HHS.gov⁶ 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. Tobacco Reports And Publications | HHS.gov

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD USES TOBACCO OR NICOTINE PRODUCTS

You can help your child by:¹

- encouraging them to stop immediately
- encouraging them to hang around with friends who don't use tobacco or nicotine products
- helping them understand reasons they should stop and offering ways for them to stay busy – such as, exercise, activities, and hobbies
- talking about their thoughts and feelings
- helping them stay busy—maybe by suggesting a new hobby to try
- helping them stay clear of places where smoking is allowed
- help him or her out by speaking to your child's guidance counselor, school nurse, or a healthcare professional to learn about local resources available to your child and strategies you can use to help your child

For more information, you can consult these resources.



See Child Behavior and Tips Chart on page 5 and 4

RESOURCES

There are additional organizations and resources that can provide information on these and other lifestyle behaviors. The educational resources listed or linked to in this publication are provided as a convenience. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (RJRT) is not responsible for the content of those materials. The statements and views in those materials do not necessarily represent the views of RJRT or its management.

Books

Borden, Sarah, et al.
Middle School: How to Deal.
Chronicle Books, 2005.

Ciannetti, Charlene S. and Margaret Sagarese.
The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years.
Broadway Books, 1997.

Erlbach, Arlene.
The Middle School Survival Guide.
Walker and Company, 2003.

Farrell, Juliana and Beth Mayall.
Middle School: The Real Deal. From Cafeteria Food to Combination Locks.
Harper Trophy, 2001.

Mosatche, Harriet S. and Karen Unger.
Too Old for This, Too Young for That! Your survival guide for the middle-school years.
Free Spirit Publishing, 2000.

Rimm, Sylvia.
Growing Up Too Fast: The Rimm Report on the Secret World of America's Middle Schoolers.
Rodale, 2005.

Web sites

- The Centers for Disease Control "Healthy Youth!" program (www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth)
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center for Tobacco Products, Tobacco Education Resource Library: Vaping Prevention and Education https://digitalmedia.hhs.gov/tobacco/educator_hub/about/for_parents?locale=en
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Know the Risks: E-Cigarettes and Young People <https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/default.htm>

WHAT YOUR CHILD MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING ... AND TIPS FOR YOU

This chart⁷ provides a broad description of some behaviors your child could be exhibiting, along with some tips you might find useful. Keep in mind the following points:

- Every child develops at his or her own pace. Boys and girls don't necessarily develop in the same ways and at the same pace.
- Children don't necessarily complete one stage before progressing to the next. Sometimes unanticipated crises (death in a family, move to a new state, etc.) or environmental factors (the stability of a neighborhood or a family, for instance) arise that either spur or stunt development.

Grades 5 and 6

Developmental Changes Your Child Might Experience	Tips for Dealing with These Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Slight self-consciousness and an increased desire for privacy ■ Bedroom door is shut for longer periods of time ■ Early feelings of conflict between family values and peer values ■ May begin modeling the behavior of older children ■ Anxiety about "fitting in" in new school environment ■ Intense value placed on being able to do things well ■ Issues of right and wrong generally viewed narrowly ■ Less forthcoming with parents about a day's activities ■ Some avoidance of regular family activities ■ Early experimentation with risk behavior (smoking, vaping, drinking, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Respect their privacy. Try not to pry. ■ Listen when a child is expressing a value contrary to your own; don't be in a hurry to argue against it. ■ Engage the child more in decision-making processes that affect him or her directly. ■ Encourage participation in family activities, but don't always insist on it. ■ Insist on knowing what your child's plans are after school and on weekends. ■ Get to know his or her friends as much as possible. ■ Watch for signs that may indicate onset of risk behavior (glassy eyes, excessive gum chewing, an unusual amount of secrecy around who his or her friends are, evasiveness about plans).

Grades 7

Developmental Changes Your Child Might Experience	Tips for Dealing with These Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Powerful desire for privacy ■ Increased anxiety about "fitting in" and "being accepted" by peer group ■ Significant shift in academic expectations can trigger stress about ability to achieve ■ Sense of right and wrong loosens somewhat, with personal moral responsibility shifting (in some cases) from the individual to the group ■ Increased isolation from family, increasingly private about their activities ■ Peer identification rises; child will begin to dress, speak and act like those in peer group with whom she or he wants to be identified. "Fitting in" is still highly valued. ■ Group mentality pervades ■ Image conscious, may spend long hours preening, getting ready for school ■ More experimentation with risk behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Don't allow yourself to feel rejected by your child's desires for privacy. ■ Emphasize your acceptance of your child as he or she is. ■ Monitor schoolwork and performance; reinforce the child's ability to shoulder additional workload. ■ Have an occasional movie night; rent realistic movies that are reflective of risk behaviors and discuss them. ■ Introduce morally based topics of discussion at the dinner table. Gently challenge your child's assumptions; force him or her to articulate a train of thought. ■ Don't discourage the development of relationships with other adult authority figures, but learn who these people are. Get to know them. ■ Choose your battles; fighting over whether or not your child can wear old jeans to school may not be as important as deciding whether or not you will permit him/her to attend a weekend party. ■ Extend his or her curfew, but enforce it diligently.

⁷ This chart was created with input from Erik Kolbell, LSW, Dr. Cassandra Cook, PhD, and Dr. Richard Kolbell, PhD.

(Continued from page 5)

WHAT YOUR CHILD MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING ... AND TIPS FOR YOU

Grade 8	
Developmental Changes Your Child Might Experience	Tips for Dealing with These Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Child may measure him/herself against idealized physical image, such as professional models, athletes, rock stars■ Increased sense of differentiation from family; child feels less ambivalent about this separation but more concerned with status among peers■ Quicker to feel anger toward parents over disagreements, particularly related to values■ Feels more at home with academic life, more willing to con-sider responsibilities beyond academics■ Increased tendency to shift moral responsibilities to peer group■ Popularity becoming more important; may engage in "attention-getting behaviors" in order to win approval of others■ More curiosity about risk behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Give your child permission to engage in activities apart from the family.■ Allow for them to have "alone time" at home.■ Don't personalize disputes with them; let them air their feelings.■ Validate their feelings even while disagreeing with their arguments.■ Be certain to know who will be attending the party he/she has asked to go to; find out if a parent will be on hand.■ Give the child a cell phone and insist on being apprised of changes in plans when he or she is out, especially for an evening.■ Trust your child, but treat violations of trust seriously. Let them know ahead of time what consequences they might face.■ They are still young enough that you can tell them not to spend time with kids you know to be dangerous.
Grade 9	
Developmental Changes Your Child Might Experience	Tips for Dealing with These Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Greater sense of separation from family can lead to feelings of competence and independence, which can also be frightening because there is more exposure to new thoughts, feelings, and behaviors■ Concern about the importance of high school and the "stakes" attached to academic performance, the child's future, college, career, etc.■ Feelings of inferiority imposed by upper classmen on freshmen; or feelings of invincibility and elevated status that comes with being "oldest kids in the school"■ More personally responsible moral code begins to develop■ Image conscious; attention to clothes, grooming, overall appearance, style; attractiveness to the opposite sex■ Possible emergence of annoying habits at home, such as messy room, unwillingness to do family chores, sarcasm■ More evening activities that can yield conflicts at home■ Increased interest in experimentation with risk behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Grant greater degrees of independence, while at the same time reminding the child that you are there to listen to them and guide them.■ Reinforce your trust in their ability to be responsible adults.■ Avoid sending too many messages emphasizing the importance of grades and their bearing on college acceptance.■ Avoid comparing the emotional development of one child to that of another.■ Allow children to keep their room as they see fit.■ Ask your child's advice about things. As they get older, show them you have confidence in their maturity and intelligence.■ Maintain a reasonable list of chores for which they are regularly responsible.■ Decide for yourselves if you will allow them to accept car rides from older students, and make your feelings known about this before it becomes an issue.■ Never reprimand your child in front of his or her friends.