

Tips to Help Your Teen Quit Tobacco

Tobacco use, particularly cigarette smoking, is the single most preventable cause of death in the U.S. Smoking rates have declined steadily over the years, yet more than one in five Americans still smoke. In 2007, 28.5 percent of high school and 9.2 percent of middle school students smoked.¹ Everyday, approximately 4,000 American youth aged 12-17 try their first cigarette.² If current patterns of smoking behavior continue, an estimated 6.4 million of today's children can be expected to die prematurely from a smoking-related disease.³

While all states have laws making it illegal to sell cigarettes to anyone under the age of 18, 49% of students surveyed were able to purchase cigarettes in a store or gas station.⁴ The ease of access, coupled with aggressive marketing tactics by tobacco companies, has led to a significant health risk for our children. The younger a person begins using tobacco, the more likely they are to become strongly addicted to nicotine. Smoking at an early age increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, chronic lung disease, and for cancers of the lung, mouth, pharynx, esophagus and bladder.^{5,6}

The good news is most adolescent smokers want to quit and have tried several times. The problem is that many are unfamiliar with smoking cessation programs, have concerns about confidentiality, and wonder if the cessation counselors will be able to relate to their experiences. The first step in helping your child quit tobacco is to open the lines of communication.

First, resist lecturing or turning your advice into a sermon. Instead find out what appeals to your child about smoking. Remind them of the downsides such as yellow teeth, bad breath, shortness of breath, and less money to spend on other more productive pursuits. Because many teens live in the "here and now," discussing the future health effects may not be as beneficial. Also, determine if your child has tried to quit before and why they were unsuccessful. Then, introduce the possibility of speaking with their doctor to discuss cessation options.

Effective programs exist to help your child quit. The New York States' Quitline is a free and confidential program, providing evidence-based cessation services to New York State residents who want to stop using tobacco. Services for adolescents include cessation information and referral to the appropriate tobacco cessation program.

If your child denies smoking, continue to inquire about their tobacco use from time to time. Also, look for subtle warning signs such as the smell of smoke on their clothing or hair, matches or lighters in their room, open bedroom or bathroom windows for no apparent reason, frequent use of mouthwash, breath mints or gum. Finally, know if their friends use tobacco. Kids whose friends smoke are nine times more likely to be current smokers compared to kids whose friends don't smoke.⁷

Like with many adolescent issues, helping your child to quit smoking can be a challenge. The important thing to remember is that even though your child is striving for independence, they still need your guidance and support more than ever. In addition, the most significant predictor of youth smoking is parental tobacco use. So if you currently use tobacco, contact the New York States' Quitline at 1-866-NY-QUITS for information on how you can become tobacco free. The following websites have additional information regarding quitting:

www.smokefree.gov

www.cancer.org

www.lungusa.org

www.nysmokefree.com

1. **Children and Adolescents.** U.S. Public Health Service, 2007
2. **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: (Office of Applied Studies).** Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005;NSDUH Series H-27;DHHS publication no. (SMA) 05-4061.
3. **CDC. Office of Smoking and Health, 2002 calculations based upon: Smoking attributable mortality and years of potential life lost—United States, 1984. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 1997;46:444-451.**
4. **CDC. [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2005](#) [pdf 300K]. *Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report* 2006;55(SS-5):1–108.**
5. **CDC. *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Young People, A Report of the Surgeon General.* Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1994.**
6. **CDC. *The Health Consequences of Smoking, A Report of the Surgeon General.* Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004.**
7. **CDC. Tobacco Information and Prevention Source – Overview. Retrieved September 24, 2004 from www.cdc.gov/tobacco/issue.htm**