Talking to your teen about smoking

Make no mistake about it. Cigarettes are a deadly and highly addictive drug. The fact that they are also legal makes them all the more dangerous. Technically, it is illegal in many regions for anyone under nineteen to buy cigarettes, but this doesn't stop many teens from getting a hold of cigarettes. Your best defence is to understand the roots of teenage smoking and be an informed and positive role model.



Tips and tools you can use

You can save your teen the painful—and sometimes unsuccessful—process of quitting smoking by convincing them not to start. If your teen is already smoking, discussing the social and health risks may encourage an attempt to quit. Here are a few tips to try:

Social pressures

- Smoking is promoted as being glamorous or sophisticated; help your teen recognize that the truth is plain ugly.
- Talk about how smoking makes your clothes, hair and breath smell bad.
- Talk about how it can permanently stain teeth and fingers yellow.
- Discuss the cost. Smoking is an expensive habit and can cost hundreds of dollars a year, or more; talk about how the money could be better spent.
- Nowadays many people shun smokers and consider cigarettes a nuisance.
- Contrary to popular belief, smoking does not help you stay slim.

Health risks

- Cigarettes contain two hazardous substances: tar and nicotine.
- The effects of tar are immediate: tar in the lungs causes coughing, wheezing and a sore throat.
- Short-term effects of nicotine are headache, nausea and dizziness.
- Long-term effects of nicotine can include lung and throat cancer, emphysema and bronchitis. Smoking causes over 80 per cent of lung cancer cases.
- Chewing tobacco can cause cancer of the mouth.
- In total, tobacco use causes roughly 40,000 deaths per year in Canada.

Teaching by example

- Modeling positive choices is far more effective than just talking about them.
- If you are a smoker, the best way to encourage your teen not to pick up the habit is to quit.
- Not only will your youngsters avoid the perils of smoking, but you will also improve your own health.

Quitting

- Your teen's doctor can recommend appropriate quitting methods.
- Medication by tablet, patch and/or nicotine gum may be prescribed.

- A number of excellent self-help programs are available for those looking to quit smoking at any age. For resources in your area, search online, or talk to the local branch of the Canadian Cancer Society.

While you cannot truly ensure that your kids will not smoke or become addicted to cigarettes, you can work on maintaining a good relationship with them. You will achieve this by spending time with them, making them feel that they can talk to you about anything, and above all, reinforcing at every step that you will be there for them with your love and an open mind, helping them make the best possible choices for themselves.