

## Kids & Drug-talk: Say More Than “Just Say No”

Marty came home from school an hour late and told his mom, Tonya, he was hanging out with friends in the school parking lot.

“Which friends?” asked Tonya.

“Guys from school,” replied Marty as he headed for his room.

“Hold it. I’m not done giving you the third degree,” said Tonya. “Did any of the guys in the parking lot offer you a cigarette or alcohol or any other drugs?”

Marty rolled his eyes and smirked, “What? You don’t trust me, now?”

“I trust you when you are open and straightforward with me,” Tonya answered calmly. “Just now, you dodged two of my questions, which makes me curious. Are you being secretive?”

Shaking his head, Marty said, “What’s with the paranoia? I told you where I was.”

Tonya sat down and pointed for him to sit across from her. “You just dodged my third question,” she said. “I think we need to have a talk.”

### Talk the Talk

No matter how innocent Marty is, Tonya’s “third degree” is not out of line. She knows that one of the best ways to keep kids safe from drugs is to talk about her expectations, openly and calmly.

Harmful drugs are prevalent in our society, and young people need to know the consequences of using. Kids may be pressing for independence, but the truth is they need boundaries, guidelines, emotional support, and attention from responsible adults who care about them. Sometimes, they need us to give them the “third degree.”

In a 2002 survey by Partnership for a Drug-Free America, two-thirds of youth

aged 13 to 17 said that upsetting their parents or losing the respect of family and friends is one of the main reasons they don’t smoke marijuana or use other drugs. It’s not all about peer pressure. Your words and opinions do matter.

### “Just Say No” Goes Just So Far

“Just Say No” is a great slogan. Ideally, it inspires kids to realize that they have the right and the power of self-control to refuse drugs when they are offered. But situations involving behavior choices can be complicated. The word “no” isn’t enough of a shield for the real world of peer pressure, raging hormones, or academic and social stresses.

You can help kids find more ways to resist the temptation to experiment with drugs.

Here are some suggestions for combining talk and action to help give kids the tools they need to make the right choices:

- Set limits with clear rules and appropriate consequences for breaking rules.
- Know what your children are doing, and get to know those they spend time with. Stay in touch with the other parents or guardians.
- Be involved in your kids’ lives.
- Be a good listener. When kids talk to you, ask open-ended, nonjudgmental questions. Give them opportunities to reach practical and healthy conclusions on their own.
- Learn about substance abuse issues, including health and safety risks of specific kinds of drugs.
- Let your kids know that you would be sad and disappointed if you learned they decided to use.

- Help kids practice ways to say “no” in situations where there might be pressure: “No thanks. I’d get kicked off the team if I got caught;” “It makes me uncomfortable to be around drugs;” or “No way, my parents would kill me.”
- Give your kids ways to contact you if they need to be picked up from a party or a situation where they are uncomfortable.
- Let kids know that people who offer drugs don’t expect them to say yes. Tell them, “You will be respected more if you say “no,” though those who use might not say it aloud.”
- Be a good role model. Children who see their caregivers smoking, abusing alcohol or prescription drugs, or using illicit drugs are more likely to abuse these or other drugs, themselves.

Marty wasn’t happy about Tonya’s third degree, but he knew it showed his mother’s concern for him, and he knew that she would continue to be vigilant. He also knew he would not want to let her down.

Talk to your kids about saying “no” to drugs—do it soon and often. Also, remember that you can call the Student Assistance Program for more ideas regarding keeping your kids drug free.

**Kid troubles?** Call the Student Assistance Program and arrange to talk to a counselor. Contacts are confidential within legal limits and available at no cost to students and their family members.

Call (515) 244-6090 or (800) 327-4692.  
TTY: (515) 288-9022 or (877) 542-6488.