



# Alcohol Cannabis Nicotine

Tips for  
parents of  
11 to 16 year  
olds

Englisch

Die Stellen für **Suchtprävention**  
im  **Kanton Zürich**

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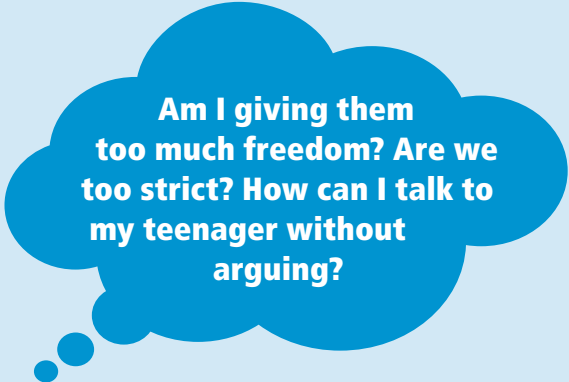
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# Dear Parents

Puberty is a challenging time for adolescents and parents alike. Adolescents are supposed to be gaining their independence, but they still need your support in many areas. Many parents ask:



**Am I giving them too much freedom? Are we too strict? How can I talk to my teenager without arguing?**

There are no easy answers. There are many things you just have to keep on negotiating, including when it comes to alcohol, smoking and cannabis.

## **Avoiding addictive substances as far as possible**

Adolescents' bodies and brains are going through significant changes. As a result, they are more sensitive to addictive substances than adults. Therefore, there is good reason to advocate that adolescents shouldn't consume addictive substances.

## **First the good news**

It's normal for adolescents to «try out» adult things. Some do this by consuming alcohol, tobacco products (including e-cigarettes, shisha, snus etc.) or cannabis. Many parents worry a lot about this, so it's good to know:

**«The vast majority of adolescents under the age of 16 do not have a problematic involvement with addictive substances.»**



# My child doesn't consume addictive substances. What to do to ensure it stays this way?

## **Nurture your relationship**

Reliable relationships can help prevent addiction. Set some time aside to spend together. Talk to each other. What does your child enjoy doing? Who do they spend their free time with? Show an interest and listen to your child. Take them seriously and try to understand their world.

## **Speak your mind**

Parents' opinions matter. Even though adolescents would never admit it. Therefore, say what you think about addictive substances. Justify your opinion. If parents don't say anything, adolescents believe they agree with everything.

**I think it's important that adolescents don't smoke cannabis. Their brains are developing so much. Smoking cannabis can harm their development.**

**I'm glad you told me, even though I don't like what you did.**

## **Talk about addictive substances**

The longer your child avoids trying addictive substances, the better. Most adolescents find addictive substances exciting. There are a lot of misconceptions among adolescents and they often don't know all the facts. Be informed. Talk to your son or daughter early on about addictive substances and the risks involved.

## **Build trust**

Children and adolescents sometimes break the rules. They do things they regret. For example, because of peer pressure in a group. What is important is that your child can talk to you about it without losing your love. This is how to build trust and means your child is more likely to tell you when something goes wrong. It doesn't mean you can't get angry. And it doesn't mean there can't be consequences. On the contrary, it helps adolescents if they can make it right again.

## **Set an example**

Adolescents watch how adults handle addictive substances and this can influence them. Keep your own consumption in moderation. Get help if you can't. Talk to your child about it. This is also setting a good example for your child.

## **Rewards can help**

Nicotine is particularly highly addictive. The prospect of a reward helps some adolescents not to smoke or vape<sup>1</sup> below the age of 18 or 20.

<sup>1</sup> Use of e-cigarettes is often referred to as «vaping».

# How can I tell if my child is consuming addictive substances?

## Look out for signs

- Keep an eye on your son or daughter.
- Speak to them if you smell smoke or alcohol.

Further signs that something may be wrong include:

- Performance at school suddenly deteriorates
- Sleep rhythm changes
- Recent severe withdrawal and evasion
- Loss of interest in hobbies
- Change or loss of friendships
- Heavy mood swings, listlessness
- Frequent sadness
- Frequent money worries

It's not uncommon to see some of these things in puberty. However, if you answered «yes» frequently, it would be worth taking a closer look. Many things can be hiding behind these signs: not only addictive substance use, but also mental health problems or a crisis. If you aren't sure what's wrong, seek advice. You'll find addresses on page 15.



# My child consumes addictive substances. What can I do?

## Keep calm and try to find out more

Adolescents trying alcohol, (e-)cigarettes and cannabis doesn't necessarily mean serious problems. We see that everyday in our consultations. Some adolescents do no more than try these substances. Some consume them only rarely to share an experience with friends. Others consume more – perhaps also to forget problems. They are the ones at risk and who need help. Try to find out why and how often your child is consuming addictive substances.

**I'd like to understand what's going on because I'm worried. How often do you drink alcohol? What do you like about it?**

## This is how you can approach a conversation

Choose another time for the conversation if you or your child are angry. Pick a quiet

moment or tell them when you're going to talk about it. Let your child feel that they are loved.

**I'm too angry at the moment. We'll talk about it when I've calmed down.**

If you suspect problems behind the use, seek advice. Don't overreact if your child has only tried substances. But be clear that you expect them not to consume them again.

## Speak your mind

Your opinion matters to teenagers, even though they wouldn't admit it. Say what you think. Justify your opinion.

## Be informed about the risks

Adolescents often don't know all the facts. Be informed. Talk to your son or daughter about the risks.



**I don't want you to smoke e-cigarettes. They are harmful and often contain nicotine. That's highly addictive.**

### **Be consistent**

Agree with your child about what will happen if they continue to consume addictive substances. Be aware that strict punishments can cause resistance. Your child could rebel against you more than ever. Therefore, discuss with them what feasible consequences would help them stick to the rules. Always fulfill your part of the deal. Your consistency helps your child stick to the rules.

### **Trust is more important than control**

Adolescents must know: «If I have a serious problem, my parents are there for me.» This trust can be broken if parents secretly search through a coat or bedroom. If you

think your child is hiding something, you can say:

**I don't believe you entirely. But I don't want to go through your things in secret. What can we do to trust each other again?**

### **Get support**

Seeking help is a sign of strength. Many parents have the same concerns. Talk to other parents. Discuss things with your friends. Professionals can help too.



# What can I say to my child about addictive substances?

## **Adolescents shouldn't consume addictive substances**

There are good reasons to think this.

Adolescents' bodies and brains are going through significant development. Addictive substances can hinder this development. Adolescents tolerate a lot less than adults and become addicted more quickly. This is why most legal addictive substances are

only sold to over 18 year olds. Therefore, be clear to your child: «Adolescents shouldn't consume addictive substances.»

Don't just say «no». Also explain why you don't want your child to consume addictive substances. The following arguments may help you in discussions with adolescents.





**I have good reasons why you shouldn't consume addictive substances:**

### **1. You're protecting your brain from damage**

Adolescents' brains undergo significant development in puberty. The brain is therefore particularly sensitive to substances like alcohol, cannabis and nicotine. These substances could disturb your brain development.

### **2. You'll live a life free from addiction**

Nicotine is particularly highly and quickly addictive. You can also become addicted to alcohol and cannabis. Adolescents get addicted more quickly because their brains are more sensitive. Addiction leaves you trapped and causes problems.

### **3. You will save a lot of money**

Addicts need more and more of their addictive substance. That costs money. You won't have this money then to spend on other things.

### **4. You will look better and be fitter**

Tobacco products will give you wrinkles later in life and brown teeth. Other addictive substances make you look old too. You'll be fitter if you don't consume these substances.

### **5. You will live longer and be healthier**

People who regularly consume addictive substances die younger and get ill more frequently with cancer and other diseases.

### **6. Sober means fewer problems**

Alcohol, cannabis and other substances are intoxicating. They make you lose control. Intoxicated people are involved in more accidents, arguments, fights, and rapes. Those who frequently drink or smoke cannabis can't concentrate as well and often have major problems at school or later on in their education and training.

### **7. Protect your mental health**

Cannabis in particular can cause or exacerbate mental illness.

### **8. The tobacco and alcohol industry make money from addicts**

Do you agree with that? Do you want to be giving your pocket money to these companies?

### **9. The majority of adolescents don't consume addictive substances**

It's not true that they all smoke, vape, smoke cannabis or drink<sup>2</sup>. Most under 16 year olds normally don't.

<sup>2</sup> The HBSC study 2018 shows that only a considerable minority of 15 year olds drink and smoke on a weekly basis (smoking: girls: 7.7%, boys: 9.7%. Drinking: girls: 3.9%, boys: 11.1%). Most 15 year olds haven't tried cannabis. 83% of girls and 73% of boys have never smoked cannabis. These figures are even lower in younger adolescents. [www.hbsc.ch](http://www.hbsc.ch)

# Where can I find out more about addictive substances?

## Find out more online

Not all parents know the same about addictive substances. If you want to find out more about something, visit our website [suchtprevention-zh.ch/safer-use-und-sucht](https://suchtprevention-zh.ch/safer-use-und-sucht) (German).



There you can find information about all legal and illegal addictive substances and behavioural addictions.

## Watch videos



You can find helpful short videos at [meinteenger.ch](https://meinteenger.ch) (German, French, Italian).

## Or read these flyers

You'll find all of the following three at [suchtprevention-zh.ch](https://suchtprevention-zh.ch).

### Cannabis



Flyer for parents whose child smokes cannabis (German).

### Medications and polysubstance use



Some adolescents use medications as recreational drugs (German).

## Warning against harmful synthetic cannabinoids



Cannabis products are being sold that have been synthetically strengthened. They can be life-threatening (German).

## Parent information from Sucht Schweiz

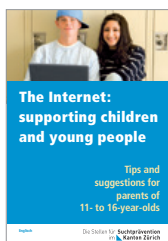


Detailed information on various topics is available at [suchtschweiz.ch](http://suchtschweiz.ch) (German, French, Italian).

## And what about digital media?

Adolescents spend a lot of time on their phones or computers. That worries parents. Some of the contents of this brochure will also help when dealing with digital media. For more information, see flyer:

«**The Internet: supporting children and young people**»  
(14 languages, [suchtpraevention-zh.ch](http://suchtpraevention-zh.ch))



# What can I do as my child gets older?

## Support your child in being self-responsible

Beer and wine can be sold to adolescents from the age of 16 – potentially tobacco too by 2024. It's not surprising then that adolescents drink and smoke more from the age of 16. What can you do?

- Starting an apprenticeship or new school is a challenging time. It entails getting to grips with new tasks and meeting new people. Support your child in this transition. Ask them about it, show an interest, including with regard to addictive substances. What do your child's new peers think about it? Do many of them smoke? What does your child think about it all?
- Talk to your son or daughter about what they should be mindful of. The important aspects are where, how much and why. You shouldn't go to school or work drunk or stoned. You can't drive a vehicle under the influence of drugs or alcohol. You shouldn't be consuming addictive substances regularly or a lot in one go. If you don't feel good, you shouldn't do it. Addictive substances don't solve problems, they make them bigger.
- If your child consumes addictive substances: What do you want the rules to be at home? Will you allow your son or daughter to smoke on the balcony? Can they drink alcohol or smoke cannabis with friends? Some parents allow this. This way they keep up with what's going on, and make sure their child consumes these substances in a protected environment. For others, that's unthinkable. What's right for you? Chat to your friends and acquaintances about it, and above all talk to your son or daughter. Agree on shared rules.
- Stay connected. As your child gets older, you can't have as much say in what they do. But that doesn't mean your opinion no longer matters. Chat to them, ask them how things are at school, share your perceptions and feelings with them. And make it clear that you are there for them: if something is bothering them or even if they've done something stupid and need help.
- If you are worried that your son or daughter is drinking or smoking too much, or smoking cannabis, and talking to them doesn't work, seek advice.



**My son (17) drinks and smokes cannabis with peers at the weekend. What can he do to minimise the risks? What should I say to him?**

## **Teach them low-risk behaviour**

Young people have to learn how to deal with addictive substances in a low-risk manner. Give your child these tips:

- Watch out for each other, take responsibility for each other.
- Before going out, agree how they are getting home. Make sure nobody drives a car who has drunk alcohol or smoked cannabis. Only get in a car with someone who is sober.
- If someone is heavily intoxicated, make sure that someone takes them home or comes to collect them. Stay with this person until they are «safe».
- Don't mix substances: Don't consume alcohol at the same time as or in close succession with other addictive substances. The various effects can intensify to a dangerous extent.
- If someone loses consciousness: put them on their side in the recovery position and call an ambulance (tel. 144). Alcohol poisoning can be fatal without the proper professional help.
- If someone gets into a fight: don't argue, just make sure your friend leaves the place of conflict.
- Have drugs tested ([saferparty.ch](https://www.saferparty.ch)).
- Have condoms handy.

# And what about me?

## Questions can help

We hope this brochure has given you some helpful tips. Questions can also provide some useful food for thought. You could discuss them with your partner, friends or even your child.

- When did I get drunk or stoned for the first time? How did my parents react?
- When I make a mistake, what reaction do I find helpful?
- Would I notice if alcohol disappears or a few cigarettes go missing?
- Which substances do I find OK – which aren't OK?
- Does my child know what I think about smoking cannabis, drinking and smoking?
- Does my child's other parent/legal guardian share the same opinion as me on addictive substances?
- What helps me to stay calm?
- Do I trust my child? When don't I trust my child? Is that down to me or my child?
- Do the same rules apply for my child as for me?

## What should I do if I smoke myself?

### Talk about it

If your child knows you smoke, talk to them about it. You can say: «I know smoking is harmful. However, I can't stop at the moment because I'm addicted. That's why it's best not to start in the first place.»

And don't smoke inside the home or in the car. Passive smoking is harmful.

### Get support

Do you want to stop smoking? It's easier to do with support. You can find addresses and more at [stopsmoking.ch](https://stopsmoking.ch).

## What should you do if a family member has an addiction problem?

### Get help

If you or your partner has a problem with addictive substances, seek advice. Getting help is a sign of strength. Addresses are provided on the right. Further useful information is available at [elternundsucht.ch](https://elternundsucht.ch).





## What should I expect if I call an advice centre?

### Many parents are unsure whether to seek advice

What you can be sure of is that whatever you are worried about, other parents have similar questions. Getting help is always a sign of strength. The professionals at the advice centres are experienced and understand your problems. Your conversations are confidential. Sometimes a telephone call alone can help. Advice is free from the centres on the right:

### Parental advice in the Canton of Zürich

- Regional addiction prevention centre:  
[suchtpraevention-zh.ch/kontakt](https://suchtpraevention-zh.ch/kontakt)



- [elternnotruf.ch](https://elternnotruf.ch):  
24hour helpline: 0848 35 45 55
- Cantonal child and adolescent centres: [kjjz.zh.ch](https://kjjz.zh.ch)
- The adolescent advice centre provides advice to parents as well: [jugendberatung.me](https://jugendberatung.me)

### Advice for adolescents

- 24-hours, anonymous and free of charge: [147.ch](https://147.ch) and tel. 147
- Adolescent advice centres: [jugendberatung.me](https://jugendberatung.me)

### Addiction advice centres

- Regional advice centre: [suchtberatung-zh.ch](https://suchtberatung-zh.ch)
- Online advice: [safezone.ch](https://safezone.ch)
- Stop smoking advice: [stopsmoking.ch](https://stopsmoking.ch)

## This brochure in other languages

[www.suchtpraevention-zh.ch/ACN](http://www.suchtpraevention-zh.ch/ACN)



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français, italiano, português, Русский, español,  
தமிழ், ไทย, ཧོ་ལོ་ཅན་, Türkçe

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