



Jefferson County  
Communities That Care

# TWELVE TALKS TO HAVE WITH TEENS

[twelvetalks.com](http://twelvetalks.com)

## HOW TO TALK WITH TEENS

**Jefferson County teens want to know that adults really care, are sincere and will be authentic with them. The best way to show your teen you care? Be there. Have a talk with your teen.**

**Look for a non-threatening opening**, perhaps starting by mentioning something you see in person or in a movie — or during a conversation about a local event or something in the news.

**You don't have to stare at each other.** In fact, you might both feel more comfortable talking on the phone about something, during commercials while watching TV or in the car.

**Ask (don't tell)** by asking open-ended questions (that can't be answered with "yes" or "no") — and by listening for as much of the conversation as you can and looking for common ground.

[twelvetalks.com](http://twelvetalks.com)

## TWELVE TALKS PARTNERS



## ABOUT TWELVE TALKS TO HAVE WITH TEENS

In early 2017, Jefferson County Communities That Care held focus groups with over 65 diverse youth from Jefferson County, Colorado, to find out what was behind youth substance misuse, violence, hopelessness and anxiety. What we found out was simple, and yet also profound. **Our youth want to talk about these important topics with trusted adults in their lives, especially parents and guardians.** We hope that Twelve Talks to Have With Teens will be a resource for parents and guardians to "be that adult for a teen in your life."



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# HOPEFULNESS & COPING

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT HOPEFULNESS AND COPING

You can support the teen in your life by talking to them about their strategies for dealing with the ups and downs, as well as talking to them about their hopes for the future.

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- Look for an opener when someone you know, or a person on TV or the radio, mentions either positive or negative coping.
- Start the conversation by talking about your own coping strategies.
- When celebrating a birthday, new school year or new calendar year, ask your teen about hopes and dreams.

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- What do you look most forward to in the next year? What about the next five years?
- I have a big-picture question for you. What gives people your age hope?
- What is your favorite coping strategy?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com) and [belowthesurfaceco.com](https://www.belowthesurfaceco.com)

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT MARIJUANA

Use of marijuana during the teen years results in damage to the teen's rapidly developing brain and can result in impaired cognitive function.

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- Watch a video together about marijuana's effects on the teenage brain.
- Bring the topic up when you see an ad for marijuana or go past a marijuana store.

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- What worries you about marijuana use in terms of addiction or messing with brain development?
- How do you handle it when (or how would you handle it if) you see marijuana being used by teens your age?
- What information do you see at your school about marijuana?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com)

# MARIJUANA

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT VAPE AND TOBACCO

Many teens don't realize that vaping, like other forms of tobacco use, can lead to serious health problems and cause a teen's developing brain to be more prone to addiction in the future.

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- Watch a recent news clip about vaping together.
- Bring it up when you see tobacco on display at a store or go past a vape store.

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- I was reading about vaping earlier. Why do you think people your age vape?
- If your friends were JUULing, how would you handle that?
- What do you think the tobacco industry wants you to believe about these products?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com) and [tobaccofreeco.org](https://www.tobaccofreeco.org)

## SEX & CONSENT

## VAPE & TOBACCO

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT SEX AND CONSENT

Jefferson County teens report that while adults discuss the physical aspects of sex with them, adults aren't providing needed guidance to teens about creating healthy relationships, sexual consent, use of alcohol as a "date rape" drug, sending nude photos and making sexual comments about others.

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- When a news story, meme, movie, TV program or music video raises issues about sex or consent, use it as an opportunity for discussion.

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- What do you think people your age consider to be sexual harassment?
- What do people you hang out with say about having sex with someone who might not actually want to?
- Hey, there is something I've been wanting to talk with you about. Honestly, it might be a little uncomfortable, but I want to know you are safe and informed. So, tell me, what do you already know about \_\_\_\_\_ (sexting, getting birth control, LGBTQ+ issues, etc.)?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com) and [loveisrespect.com](https://www.loveisrespect.com)



# BOUNDARIES

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT BOUNDARIES

**While testing limits is normal teenage behavior, teenagers are safer and happier when they have clear boundaries and family rules.**

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- If the teen requests more freedom, use the opportunity to start a conversation about boundaries and expectations.
- Start the conversation as a response to finding out that your teen has engaged in dangerous behaviors.

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- I'd like to make sure we are both clear on boundaries and consequences. When is a good time to have this conversation?
- What are next steps in clarifying how we are handling your curfew/letting us know where you are/your friends vaping in our car/etc.?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com)

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT DATING

**About one third of teens have a dating relationship during their high school years. It is important for adults to understand the dynamics of teen relationship violence and to talk with their teens about creating healthy relationships.**

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- Use examples of healthy or unhealthy relationships that you see in the media — or in real life — to start the conversation.
- Send your teen a relationship quiz found at [twelvetalks.com/dating](https://www.twelvetalks.com/dating), then ask them about it.

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- What would your ideal boyfriend or girlfriend be like? How would you expect to be treated?
- How do you show a girlfriend or boyfriend that you trust them?
- What would you consider crossing the line for a boyfriend or girlfriend? What about checking your cell phone or email? Asking for nude pictures?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com) and [loveisrespect.org](https://www.loveisrespect.org)



# DATING

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT IDENTITY

Who am I? How do I fit in? What is my role? These are all key questions adolescents are asking themselves. Talking to an adult they trust can help youth form a positive sense of personal identity.

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- Tell your teen your stories about your family, your experiences, your history, challenges you faced, etc. Ask to hear their stories.
- If you watch a movie or show, or see an ad that uses stereotypes, ask your teen if the stereotype stood out to them — and what they thought.

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- I'm curious about what you think people mean by identity?
- What do you think has the biggest effect on how you see yourself? What about how other people perceive you?
- If there was one thing I could be more supportive about in your life, what would that be?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com) and [ycdiversity.org](https://www.ycdiversity.org)

# ALCOHOL

# IDENTITY

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT ALCOHOL

Adults often feel that a little alcohol is harmless for teens. However, underage alcohol use — particularly binge drinking — leads to risky sexual behavior, use of other drugs, alcohol poisoning or violence.

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- When you see advertisements for alcohol, or are going past an alcohol store or bar, use that as a conversation starter.
- Ask them if they know the definition of binge drinking. (Answer: 4 drinks for women/5 drinks for men.)

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- What would you consider to be too much to drink?
- What worries you about teens your age drinking?
- Why do you think people drink?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com)



# MENTAL HEALTH

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Teens, like all people, have good days and bad days. Adults can let youth know they are there for them to talk, and can help them cope or get support and care when they need it.

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- When you hear something on a show, a movie or a song that implies that people should “get over it” or “toughen up” when experiencing mental health challenges, ask your teen what they think.
- Take the quiz at [letstalkco.org](http://letstalkco.org) with your teen to help you both understand your own beliefs about mental health and mental health conditions.

**Ask a question that can’t be answered “yes” or “no.” For example:**

- How can I be there for you?
- What do you wish I understood about you?
- What do you do when you’re dealing with challenges like stress or anxiety?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](http://twelvetalks.com) and [letstalkco.org](http://letstalkco.org)

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT FRIENDS

Adults can’t control youth friendships, but you can be a role model for positive, respectful relationships and talk with youth about healthy friendships.

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- If you have a situation with a colleague or friend, tell your teen about it and ask how they would handle it. You might be surprised by their insights —and you are modeling the idea of talking to each other about friendships.
- When you see examples of negative peer pressure or bullying on TV or in the news, ask teens how they handle things like that at school or with friends.

**Ask a question that can’t be answered “yes” or “no.” For example:**

- What did you all end up doing last night?
- How is (*insert friend’s name here*) these days?
- What kinds of drama or disagreement come up with teens your age?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](http://twelvetalks.com) and [iriseaboveco.org](http://iriseaboveco.org)



# FRIENDS

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

**Adults can protect teens by restricting teen access to medications — and then safely disposing of them.**

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- When you hear about the opioid crisis on TV or the radio, use that as an opening to ask your teen what they think.
- If your teen or someone else in the house fills a prescription, use that as a conversation starter.

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- Why do you suppose people take other people's prescriptions?
- What are the most commonly shared prescriptions at your school? Why do you think that is happening?
- Why do you think so many people are experiencing pain killer addiction?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com)

## SOURCES OF STRENGTH

## PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

## TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT SOURCES OF STRENGTH

**Talking to the youth in your life about their own sources of strength can help them know what to do and where to turn when they need help or support.**

**Find an opening. Some ideas are:**

- Comment positively about your teen's healthy activities, whether that is sports, art, music, etc., including if you see that the activity relaxes them, helps them unwind, brings them closer to friends or helps them express themselves.

**Ask a question that can't be answered "yes" or "no." For example:**

- What are some of your natural strengths?
- What strengths are you working on building in your life?
- What are some of the things in your life that give you strength?

Learn more at [twelvetalks.com](https://www.twelvetalks.com) and [sourcesofstrength.org](https://www.sourcesofstrength.org)