



Talking to Children about Tobacco

Nearly 90% of all adult smokers started smoking before age 18, and the average age for a new smoker is 13. Talking to children about the dangers of tobacco use is an important step in keeping them safe and healthy.

According to studies by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, teens who thought their parents would disapprove of smoking were less likely to use tobacco than those who assumed their parents did not care—this is true with both smoking and non smoking parents.

When discussing tobacco use with children it is important to be clear about why tobacco can be harmful to their health and wellbeing.

What are some tips for talking to children about tobacco use?

- Start tobacco use discussions when children are young.
- Do not assume schools offer anti-tobacco education programs, because many don't. Anti-tobacco education at home may be the only exposure for your child.
- Use personal examples of friends and family who have battled tobacco addiction and tobacco-related illnesses to inform children of the dangers of smoking.
- Explain how tobacco can negatively affect a person's appearance such as premature wrinkling of the skin and yellow teeth.

- Destroy the myth that everybody smokes. Let them know that the majority of adults and youth do not use tobacco.
- Help children recognize tobacco industry tactics and the cigarette ads that target youth.
- Make your home a "smoke-free zone;" leading by example is a great way to make an impression on children.

What if I am a smoker?

No matter what your position, a child can still be influenced by your experience with smoking.

- Speak candidly about the dangers and pitfalls of tobacco use.
- Describe the physical, financial and social impacts that smoking can have on a person's life.
- Take pro-active steps for yourself to quit smoking - join a quit smoking group or consult your health care provider.

How can I help my child quit?

If your child has already started using tobacco, it is important to show interest in their health and behavior in a non-threatening way. Be supportive and avoid using ultimatums. Try understanding what motivated your child to start smoking, and help them brainstorm ways to overcome this challenge.

Often, children start smoking as a way to get attention or to seek acceptance from their peers. Talk to a health care provider specializing in children's health or call RHAMC for quit smoking tips and resources.