



HOW PARENTS CAN PROTECT THEIR KIDS FROM BECOMING ADDICTED SMOKERS

The vast majority of parents do not want their kids to smoke, for obvious reasons. Smoking causes a wide range of serious health problems—including lung cancer, heart disease and stroke—and frequently results in premature disability and death. To make matters worse, kids can start becoming seriously addicted to smoking very quickly, just weeks or even days after first “experimenting” with cigarettes.¹ What’s more, smoking can harm kids well before they reach adulthood by causing a number of immediate, sometimes irreversible, health risks and problems.² Right now, 8.0 percent of high school students smoke, although experimentation can start much earlier.³ Each day, about 2,500 kids in the United States try their first cigarette; and another 400 additional kids under 18 years of age become new regular, daily smokers.⁴ That’s more than 150,000 new underage daily smokers in this country each year—and roughly one-third of them will eventually die prematurely from smoking-caused disease.⁵

Fortunately, parents can take a number of effective actions to protect their kids from starting to smoke or becoming another one of the tobacco industry’s addicted customers and victims. Being good parents and role models is important, but it takes much more to prevent kids from smoking. Parents must also work against pro-smoking influences outside the home, including efforts to ensure that schools are doing their best to prevent and reduce youth smoking and to reduce tobacco-company marketing that reaches and influences kids. The U.S. tobacco companies spend nearly \$25 million per day marketing their products, and they rely on youth smokers to replace their adult customers who quit or die.⁶ As one cigarette company executive put it, “the base of our business is the high school student.”⁷

Parents as Anti-Smoking Role Models (Whether They Smoke or Not)

What parents say, how they act, and the values they communicate through their words and deeds has an enormous influence on children; and that applies to tobacco use, as well. Studies have found that parental actions, attitudes, and opinions about smoking have a great deal of influence on whether or not kids smoke.⁸ A 2004 study found that parental antismoking actions such as having restrictions about smoking in the home in place or sitting in non-smoking sections of restaurants are associated with reductions in children’s smoking.⁹ Specifically, parents can take the following actions to help ensure that their children remain (or become) tobacco-free:

- **If you don’t smoke, don’t start! If you do smoke, quit!** Research shows that children who have a parent who smokes are more likely to smoke and to be heavier smokers at young ages.¹⁰ When parents quit smoking, their children become less likely to start smoking and more likely to quit if they already smoke.¹¹
- **If you smoke, share your struggles to quit with your children.** Kids greatly underestimate how difficult it is to quit smoking.¹² Showing how hard it is to quit (and making sure quitting doesn’t look easy) can help eliminate this misperception.¹³ Continuing to try to quit, despite the difficulties, also sends a strong anti-smoking message.
- **Maintain a smoke-free home.** A smoke-free home makes children less likely to smoke, even if their parents smoke.¹⁴ By not allowing anyone to smoke in their homes, parents not only make smoking less convenient for their kids but also make a powerful statement that they believe smoking is undesirable.
- **Tell your kids that you don’t want them to smoke and will be disappointed if they do.** Parental attitudes, opinions, and feelings about their kids’ smoking status greatly influence whether or not kids will smoke, even when the parents smoke.¹⁵

* For help quitting, go to http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/more_resources/quitting.

- **Make sure your kids have the facts they need.** By making sure that their kids know how harmful smoking is, parents can help their kids to develop a firm, negative perception or attitude about smoking practices and their consequences, and kids with such negative perceptions or attitudes are less likely to smoke.¹⁶
- **Emphasize the immediate health effects.** Most teenagers wrongly believe that smoking will have no direct effect on their health until they reach middle age.¹⁷ But smoking causes many immediate or near-term effects on health, including persistent coughs, respiratory problems, a greater susceptibility to illness, and decreased physical performance.¹⁸
- **Emphasize the effects of smoking on physical appearance.** Cigarette ads create the image that smoking is sexy and attractive; and kids identify improving self-image as a reason for smoking.¹⁹ But smoking actually causes yellow teeth, bad breath, smelly clothes, and more severe and early facial wrinkles.²⁰
- **Destroy the myth that everybody smokes.** Many kids overestimate the rate of smoking among their peers, and such overestimation is one of the strongest predictors of smoking initiation.²¹ For example, a 1999–2000 survey found that teens believed 67 percent of adults and 54 percent of teens were current smokers; in reality, less than 25 percent of adults and 17 percent of all teens were current smokers at that time.²²

Parents can also help to keep their kids from smoking by following basic good-parenting practices. For example, kids who do well in school and participate in structured, extra-curricular activities are less likely to be susceptible to smoking; and parents can encourage and support their kids to do both.²³ As an added bonus, by setting and consistently enforcing realistic rules, talking to their children, paying attention to the kinds of friends their kids are associating with and generally staying interested and involved in their children's lives, parents can not only reduce the risk that their children will smoke but also reduce the chances that they will become involved in other risky behaviors, such as alcohol and other drug use and early sexual involvement.²⁴

Good Parenting is Not Enough!

While parents can play an important role in youth smoking prevention, kids are subject to other powerful influences outside their homes that can play a critical role in whether they smoke or not. Most notably, the tobacco companies spend nearly \$9.5 billion per year to market and promote their products.²⁵ Most of these marketing efforts reach kids. In fact, research studies have found that kids are three times as sensitive to tobacco advertising than adults, are more likely to be influenced to smoke by cigarette marketing than by peer pressure, and that one third of underage experimentation with smoking is attributable to tobacco company advertising and promotion.²⁶

More generally, the big tobacco companies have been trying to shift attention and support away from establishing effective new laws or policies to prevent and reduce tobacco use among kids by promoting the idea that the problem should be left to parents. But placing the entire burden on parents will not reduce the availability of tobacco products to underage buyers, stop tobacco marketing that reaches kids, establish tobacco-free schools or reduce youth exposure to tobacco marketing and tobacco use outside of the home. To address these powerful factors that influence kids to smoke, parents can take the following actions:

- **Show your kids how tobacco ads and images are designed to manipulate them.** Parents can reduce the powerful impact of all the tobacco ads and positive-smoking images that confront kids every day by talking with their children about the ads' false ideas of glamour, maturity, coolness and beauty, as well as about how the tobacco companies try to manipulate kids into becoming their future addicted consumers.
- **Make your kids' schools tobacco-free.** By getting more involved in their children's schools, parents can try to make sure that the schools follow effective anti-tobacco policies developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and others, such as:

- Prohibiting all smoking on school property or at school events.
 - Not accepting any funding, curricula or other materials from the tobacco industry.
 - Educating students about the short- and long-term negative consequences of tobacco use, and providing peer-pressure refusal skills.
 - Providing prevention education in kindergarten through 12th grade, with intensive education in junior high or middle school and reinforcement in high school.
 - Providing tobacco-prevention training for teachers.
 - Encouraging parental support of school-based tobacco-prevention programs.
 - Offering assistance to both staff and student smokers who wish to quit.²⁷
- **Support other local tobacco-prevention efforts**, such as new state or local laws to make restaurants and other public areas smoke-free or new initiatives to enforce the existing laws that prohibit tobacco sales to kids.²⁸
 - **Support new state and federal laws to restrict tobacco marketing that reaches kids**, such as state laws requiring that all tobacco products be kept behind the counter or the federal law that gives the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authority over tobacco products and their marketing (this law parallels the FDA's existing authority over other food and drug products).²⁹
 - **Support new state and federal programs to prevent and reduce tobacco use among kids**, such as increases to federal or state cigarette taxes (which reduce smoking rates, especially among kids) or new state investments of tobacco-settlement funds in programs to prevent and reduce youth smoking.³⁰

There are many ways to take action to influence local, state and federal laws and programs to prevent and reduce tobacco use among kids. Working with locally-based tobacco prevention coalitions is one great option. Another way to take action and stay informed is to visit the Action Center on the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids' website. The Campaign's website is at www.tobaccofreekids.org and the Action Center is at www.tobaccofreekids.org/take_action.

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¹ DiFranza, J, et al., "Tobacco Acquisition and Cigarette Brand Selection Among Youth," *Tobacco Control* 1994, 3:334-38. See also, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (TFK) factsheet, *The Path to Smoking Addiction Starts at Very Young Ages*. TFK factsheets are available at http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/fact_sheets/.

² See TFK factsheet, *Smoking's Immediate Effects on the Body*, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0264.pdf>.

³ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Tobacco Use Among Middle and High School Students—United States, 2011-2016," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, 66(23): 597-603, June 15, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/pdfs/mm6623a1.pdf>. Current smoker defined as having smoked in the past month. The 2015 NYTS found that 9.3% of high school students smoked. The 2015 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, using a different methodology than the NYTS, found that 10.8% of U.S. high school kids smoke. See also U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2014, <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/>.

⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), HHS, *Results from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH: Detailed Tables*, 2016. <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabs-2015/NSDUH-DetTabs-2015/NSDUH-DetTabs-2015.pdf>.

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⁶ U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC). *Cigarette Report for 2014*, 2016, https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/federal-trade-commission-cigarette-report-2014-federal-trade-commission-smokeless-tobacco-report/ftc_cigarette_report_2014.pdf; FTC, *Smokeless Tobacco Report for 2014*, 2016, https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/federal-trade-commission-cigarette-report-2014-federal-trade-commission-smokeless-tobacco-report/ftc_smokeless_tobacco_report_2014.pdf [Data for top 5 manufacturers only].

⁷ Lorillard, *Memo from TL Achey to Lorillard President Curtis Judge*, August 30, 1978. Bates No. TINY0003062.

⁸ Newman, I, et al., "The influence of parental attitude and behavior on early adolescent cigarette smoking," *Journal of School Health* 59(4):150-2, April 1989. See also, Distefan, J, et al., "Parental influences predict adolescent smoking in the United States, 1989-1993," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 22:466-74, 1998.

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