



Help Your Child

# Be Tobacco Free



## Inside:

- Why and when adolescents use tobacco
- Things you can do to help your child be tobacco free
  - Tips for talking about the topic
- Facts about tobacco use you can share with your child
  - Helping your child deal with peer pressure



## what you'll find in this booklet

You know your child and what works best when it comes to talking about important topics like tobacco. The goal of this booklet is to provide some extra help. It includes:

- information about why and when adolescents use tobacco
- things you can do to help your child be tobacco free
- tips for talking about the topic
- facts about tobacco use you can share with your child
- suggestions to help your child deal with peer pressure

Use this booklet to keep the conversation going and help your child make the decision to be tobacco free now and in the future. This booklet was developed by Lifetime Learning Systems, Inc. and funded by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.





## welcome to adolescence!

Your child is growing up and becoming independent. This means new experiences, challenges, and changes—for both of you. You may notice that your child wants more privacy, is placing more importance on being with friends than family, is concerned about image and “fitting in,” or is starting to experiment with risky behaviors, like trying tobacco or alcohol. While all children are different, middle-schoolers often exhibit these behaviors as they go through adolescence.

You may have new concerns and find yourself asking questions, such as:

- What do we need to talk about?
- Does my child know what I think about important topics and decisions he or she may face?
- Will my child make the right decisions?

While some teens may not admit it, they still want your guidance and need to know your expectations.

## why talking about tobacco is important

Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>1</sup> You’ve probably talked to your child at times during elementary school about not using tobacco, including cigarettes and smokeless tobacco. Keep talking! Your child is at greater risk now in middle school: Young people are most likely to try smoking for the first time between the ages of 11 and 15, or grades 6 to 10.<sup>2</sup> If you’re a smoker, your child has a higher chance of becoming one, too.<sup>2</sup> Now could be a great time to quit—for both of you.

Talking to your child about tobacco use, establishing expectations, and setting an example can make a difference. Young people are more likely to be tobacco free if they know their parents don’t want them using tobacco and would be disappointed if they did—even if their parents use tobacco.<sup>3</sup>

# understanding youth and tobacco use

Let's start with the good news: Most young people do **not** use tobacco. But some adolescents are curious and think about it. Some try it and then stop. Others become regular, daily users and are addicted. Understanding what influences their decisions might help you when you talk to your child.

## why young people say "no" to tobacco

For most adolescents, it's an easy decision—they've made a personal commitment to be tobacco free. Why else do young people abstain? Some reasons include:<sup>4</sup>

- knowing their parents disapprove
- concerns about the health risks, which range from not being able to breathe well enough to play sports to cancer and strokes
- having friends who are tobacco free
- knowing how to say "no"

## why adolescents try or use tobacco

There are many reasons young people try tobacco or start using it regularly, including:<sup>2,4,5</sup>

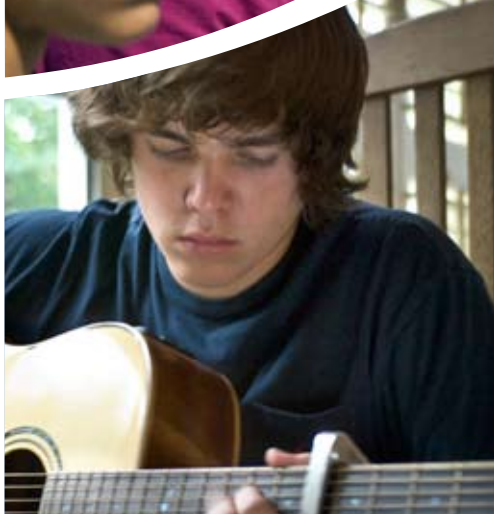
- having parents, friends, peers, or siblings who use tobacco
- overestimating the number of people who use tobacco
- linking smoking with a particular social image or being "grown-up"
- wanting to bond with peers who use tobacco, or thinking it's a way to get a particular group to like them
- having low self-esteem
- not knowing how to say "no" if friends offer them tobacco
- not doing well in school, or not being involved with school activities
- underestimating the health consequences of tobacco use
- not understanding addiction and how tough it is to quit
- lacking parental support as they face the challenges of growing up

## help keep your child from being part of the statistics

The fact that most young people don't use tobacco products doesn't mean you should not be concerned about it! Keep the conversation open. See the tips in the next section on what to cover when you talk to your child about being tobacco free.

## CDC facts & figures about middle & high school tobacco use in the United States

- Every day, approximately 4,000 youths between the ages of 12 and 17 initiate cigarette smoking in the U.S. And each day about 1,140 young people become daily cigarette smokers.<sup>6</sup>
- 8% of middle-schoolers are current cigarette smokers.<sup>6</sup> That number nearly triples to about 22% in high school.<sup>7</sup> (Current is defined as having smoked on one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey.)
- 4% of middle-school boys are current smokeless tobacco users. The number more than doubles in high school to 10%.<sup>6</sup>





## you've got influence—use it!

Adolescents start to make more and more decisions on their own. Sound familiar? You can help your child be tobacco free by:

- setting clear expectations
- setting an example
- teaching your child facts about tobacco use and how to say “no”

### keys to setting clear expectations

When adolescents know their parents don't want them to use tobacco, they're less likely to do it. Take a stand.

- **State your expectations.** Tell your child you don't want him or her to use tobacco and that you'll be disappointed if he or she does.
- **Be clear and precise.** Your child may know what you think about tobacco use, but be sure he or she knows how much you disapprove of him or her using it.
- **Make sure your child hears you.** A March 2008 study reported that 96% of middle-school parents surveyed discussed tobacco use with their 5th to 9th graders.<sup>8</sup> But only 84% of the children surveyed said their parents talked to them! Make sure your message is getting through loud and clear. And keep this survey result in mind: Almost all of the middle-schoolers surveyed were glad their parents discussed smoking with them.
- **Establish consequences.** Let your child know what will happen if he or she uses tobacco, and why you chose the consequence.

### if you use tobacco...

Talking to your child may be more of a challenge. But if you don't want your child to use tobacco, say so. Be honest if you're asked why you use it. Just make sure your child knows that you don't think he or she should use tobacco.



- **Remind your teen.** This is not a one-time conversation. Tobacco use jumps between middle school and high school, so keep talking.

## set an example

There are a lot of ways you can set an example for your child.

- **If you don't use tobacco, don't start.**
- **If you do smoke, quit.** Show your child what you expect. When parents quit smoking, their children are less likely to start.<sup>9</sup>
- **Maintain a smoke-free home**—even if you smoke. Children are less likely to smoke if they grow up in a smoke-free home.<sup>10</sup>
- **Practice healthy behaviors**, like exercising, eating well-balanced meals, and getting plenty of sleep, so that modeling healthy choices becomes a way of life for your child.

## tips for talking

Constructive, respectful, quality communication—that's what you should aim for. It lowers the chance children will experiment with tobacco.<sup>10</sup> The following tips may also help you and your child have a successful discussion:

- **Take cues from your child to figure out when it's a good time to talk.** Try talking while you're doing something you both enjoy, like playing ball or cooking.
- **Be sure you have your child's attention.** Turn off the TV and put away the cell phones if you need to so your child knows the conversation is important to you.
- **Don't lecture.** It should be a two-way discussion that goes back-and-forth.
- **Ask your child what he or she has learned in school about tobacco.** Find out why your child thinks some young people use tobacco.
- **Listen and respect your child's opinions and feelings.** Show you're listening by asking follow-up questions.
- **Comment on things your child does well and on good decisions he or she has made.** Encourage your child to keep making healthy decisions, like being tobacco free.
- **Let your child know you're there if he or she wants to talk**, especially if he or she feels pressured by peers to use tobacco.

## share the facts

You have your child's attention and you're ready to talk. How are you going to make it clear that you don't want your child to use tobacco? "Because I said so" is not enough. Help your child understand why you want him or her to be tobacco free.

## "everybody does it" is a myth

Adolescents think the number of young people (and adults) who use tobacco is higher than it is.<sup>2</sup> This misperception is one reason some young people start smoking.<sup>2</sup> The reality is:

- 92% of middle-schoolers DO NOT smoke cigarettes.<sup>6</sup>
- 96% of middle-school boys DO NOT use smokeless tobacco.<sup>6</sup>
- Over 80% of the adults in the U.S. DO NOT smoke cigarettes.<sup>11</sup>

## health consequences can be immediate!

Your child probably knows about some of the health consequences related to tobacco use, like stroke, heart disease, cancer, and gum disease.<sup>12</sup> But does your child think these issues only affect older people who have used tobacco for a long time? Set your child straight—young people can suffer health consequences, too.

- Adolescents who smoke can experience shortness of breath, phlegm production, coughing, and wheezing.<sup>4</sup>
- Young people who smoke are likely to be less physically fit than non-smokers.<sup>4</sup>

- Teen smokers are more likely than their tobacco-free friends to have panic attacks, anxiety disorders, and depression.<sup>13</sup>
- No tobacco product has been shown to be safe. Smokeless tobacco can cause cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, and esophagus—even in very young users.<sup>14</sup>

Remind your child that tobacco use can impact his or her stamina. This could lead to poor performance on the playing field or even difficulty doing everyday things, like walking around the park or mall with friends. Encourage your child to be tobacco free to avoid the health consequences and the possibility of letting down teammates, friends, and you.

## nicotine addiction affects young people, too

Most teens don't really understand nicotine addiction. They think people can quit whenever they want. But "most young people who smoke regularly are already addicted to nicotine."<sup>4</sup> When they try to quit, they experience withdrawal symptoms similar to adults.<sup>4</sup> Smokeless tobacco use is also as addictive for young people as it is for adults.<sup>4</sup>

What are the withdrawal symptoms? When people who are addicted to nicotine stop smoking, they may suffer from restlessness, hunger, depression, headaches, and other uncomfortable feelings.<sup>14</sup> What does your child think it would be like to live with these problems?

### **facing fines**

It's illegal to sell tobacco products to minors in every state. In many places, young people can be fined for possessing tobacco products. Help your child understand these legal consequences. Maybe your child will think twice about using tobacco if he or she knows it might mean having to pay for breaking the law.

### **there's nothing cool about it**

Some teens think smoking makes them look cool or will help them fit in or look more grown-up. They think they'll get some sort of "benefit" from using tobacco, like a positive social image or bonding with their peers.<sup>2</sup> This perception seems to get stronger from 5th to 9th grade, and it influences some young people to use tobacco.

It's tough to tell teens that what they think is cool isn't. How can you help make your point? Talk about what their peers think!



## what 5th to 9th graders say about tobacco

A survey of 1,540 students in 5th to 9th grade across the country had the following results:<sup>15</sup>

- Do you think smoking cigarettes makes young people look cool or fit in? 88% said NO
- Do you think smoking cigarettes is cool? 91% said NO
- Do you think smoking cigarettes makes people look grown-up? 82% said NO
- Do you think smoking cigarettes looks fun? 90% said NO
- Do you think characters portrayed in the movies look cooler when they smoke cigarettes or when they don't smoke? 44% think smoking makes movie actors look LESS cool; 45% think it doesn't make a difference

## dispel thoughts that tobacco use has benefits

As your teen gets older, keep talking to understand if your child thinks there are any so-called "benefits" to using tobacco. You can help dispel these myths and misperceptions. Use these questions to keep the conversation going.

- Find out what your child thinks is "cool." Ask, "Things are a lot different now than when I was your age. If someone were to ask you what's 'cool,' what would you say? What do you do that you think is cool? What do you see other kids doing that looks cool to you?" Emphasize the healthy choices.
- Some young people glamorize smoking because of what they see in the media. If you're watching a movie

or see a picture of a celebrity/athlete using tobacco, ask, "Why do you think he or she uses tobacco? What do you think about that? What do you like most about this person? What do you dislike?" Encourage your child to see that the positive characteristics he or she likes about the celebrity/athlete make the person interesting—not that the celebrity/athlete uses tobacco.

- If you're driving or walking and see adolescents using tobacco, ask, "Why do you think kids use tobacco?" If your child thinks adolescents use tobacco to look cool, ask, "Do you think it looks cool? What about the health consequences? What could these kids do to look cool that isn't unhealthy?"

If your child is concerned about "image," remind him or her that tobacco use can cause stained teeth, bad breath, mouth sores, wrinkles, and smelly hair and clothes.<sup>14,16</sup> How would these issues affect his or her image? Also let your child know that according to one survey, 65% of teens strongly dislike being around smokers, and 86% would rather date non-smokers.<sup>17</sup>

## pressure from peers

As adolescents get older, friends become more important and start to play a bigger role in decision making. Peers are a big influence when it comes to tobacco. How? Some adolescents may be pressured into trying it, or they may feel like they have to use tobacco to fit in. Others don't know how to say "no" when their friends offer them tobacco. And the more friends a child has who use tobacco, the greater the chances are that he or she will join them.<sup>18</sup> Get to know your child's friends. And keep up—the list may change frequently.

## if you use tobacco, share your struggles

You have first-hand knowledge you can share with your child. If you wish you had never started, say so and explain why. Describe any struggles you've had with quitting. Talk about health concerns and consequences you've experienced. Tell your child what you think smoking or using smokeless tobacco has cost you both financially and socially. Learning about real experiences may help your child better understand the risks involved.

Use this opportunity to empower your child. Ask your child for suggestions to help you quit based on what he or she has learned.

## supporting quitters

Adolescents who use tobacco have a hard time quitting—just like adults. If your child uses tobacco and wants to quit, support the decision. Speak to your healthcare professional, the school nurse, or your child's guidance counselor to learn about local resources available to your child and strategies you can use to help your child, such as:<sup>19</sup>

- helping your child stay busy
- encouraging your child to stay clear of places where smoking takes place
- reminding your child to drink lots of water, eat healthy meals regularly, and keep active
- keeping a tobacco-free home
- being there if your child wants to talk

You might even challenge your child to a nightly walk or run so that he or she can feel the benefits of quitting.

## Remember...

Keep the communication lines open. As your child gets older, he or she will experience new things and new pressures, and may have more friends who use tobacco. You can continue to be a positive influence on your child by setting expectations, expressing your disapproval of tobacco use, talking about the health consequences, and by being involved!<sup>4</sup>

## tips for saying "no"

Help your child say "no" to tobacco by practicing these refusal tips and suggested responses, or brainstorm ideas together.

Say "no" and...

- **suggest something else.** *(Not interested. Let's go watch a movie instead.)*
- **talk about the consequences.** *(No thanks. Smoking can make me short of breath.)*
- **give a reason or explain why you said "no."** *(Not interested. I want to be able to run in tomorrow's soccer game.)*
- **reverse the pressure.** *(No thanks. Why don't you toss the cigarettes? Most kids don't want to date smokers.)*
- **change the subject.** *(No thanks. Did you meet the new kid in my class?)*
- **add some humor.** *(No thanks. Dragon breath is not for me.)*
- **walk away.** *(No thanks.)*

As a last resort, suggest your child say "no" and blame you—chances are, they won't be off the mark. *(No thanks. My parents will ground me for months if they smell smoke on me.)*

## footnotes and resources

There are additional organizations and resources that can provide information on these and other lifestyle behaviors. The listing in this booklet does not imply that the organization endorses the information contained herein, nor does it constitute an endorsement of the organization or resources by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.

<sup>1</sup> CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *Fact Sheet—Tobacco-Related Mortality (updated September 2006)*. Available online at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/health\\_effects/tobacco\\_related\\_mortality.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/tobacco_related_mortality.htm)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Reducing Tobacco Use: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2000. Chapter Three. Available online at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/sgr\\_2000/00\\_pdfs/chapter3.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2000/00_pdfs/chapter3.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Chassin, L., Presson, C., Rose, J., Sherman, S. J., & Prost, J. (2002). Parental smoking cessation and adolescent smoking. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, vol. 27(6), pp. 485-96.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Young People: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 1994. Available online at [http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/NN/B/C/F/T/\\_/nnbctf.pdf](http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/NN/B/C/F/T/_/nnbctf.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> CDC. Healthy Youth! Health Topics. *Tobacco Use: School Health Guidelines, Summary*. Available online at [www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/tobacco/guidelines/summary.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/tobacco/guidelines/summary.htm)

<sup>6</sup> CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *Fact Sheet—Youth and Tobacco Use: Current Estimates (updated December 2006)*. Available online at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/youth\\_data/youth\\_tobacco.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/youth_tobacco.htm)

<sup>7</sup> CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *Cigarette Use Among High School Students—United States, 1991-2007*. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports (MMWRs), June 27, 2008, vol. 57, no. 25. Available online at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/mmwr/2008/mm5725a3\\_highlights.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/mmwr/2008/mm5725a3_highlights.htm)

<sup>8</sup> A study of 534 parents of 5th to 9th grade students, and 1,104 children in 5th to 9th grade conducted by Lifetime Learning Systems Research in March 2008. The margin of error for this particular set of data is  $\pm 2.5$  percentage points. Available online at [www.rightdecisionsrightnow.com](http://www.rightdecisionsrightnow.com)

<sup>9</sup> Farkas, A., Distefan, J.M., Choi, W.S., Gilpin, E.A. & Pierce, J.P. (1999). Does parental smoking cessation discourage adolescent smoking? *Preventive Medicine*, vol. 28(3), pp. 213-18.

<sup>10</sup> Harakeh, Z., Scholte, R.H.J., de Vries, H., & Engels, R.C.M.E. (2005). Parental rules and communication: their association with adolescent smoking. *Addiction*, vol. 100(6), pp. 862-70.

<sup>11</sup> CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *Cigarette Smoking Among Adults—United States, 2007*. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWRs), November 14, 2008, vol. 57, no. 49. Available online at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/mmwr/2008/mm5745a2\\_highlights.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/mmwr/2008/mm5745a2_highlights.htm)

<sup>12</sup> CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *Surgeon General's 2004 Report. The Health Consequences of Smoking on the Human Body*. Available online at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/sgr\\_2004/sgranimation/flash/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2004/sgranimation/flash/index.html)

<sup>13</sup> NIDA for Teens. The Science Behind Drug Abuse. *Nicotine*. Available online at [http://teens.drugabuse.gov/facts/facts\\_nicotine2.asp](http://teens.drugabuse.gov/facts/facts_nicotine2.asp)

<sup>14</sup> NIDA for Teens. The Science Behind Drug Abuse. *Mind Over Matter: The Brain's Response to Nicotine*. Available online at <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/mom/pdf/english/nicotine.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> A study of 1,540 5th to 9th grade students conducted by Lifetime Learning Systems Research in December 2007. The margin of error for this particular set of data is  $\pm 2.5$  percentage points. Available online at [www.rightdecisionsrightnow.com](http://www.rightdecisionsrightnow.com)

<sup>16</sup> CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *Information Sheets: You(th) & Tobacco*. Available online at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/youth/information\\_sheets/youthfax1.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/youth/information_sheets/youthfax1.htm)

<sup>17</sup> The American Council on Science and Health (ACSH). *The Scoop on Smoking from ACSH: what every teen should know about tobacco*. Available online at <http://thescooponsmoking.org/xhtml/faq.php>

<sup>18</sup> Mayhew, K., Flay, B., & Mott, J. (2000). Stages in the development of adolescent smoking. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, vol. 59, Suppl. 1, pp. S61-S81.

<sup>19</sup> CDC. *I Quit! What To Do When You're Sick of Smoking, Chewing or Dipping*. Available online at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit\\_smoking/how\\_to\\_quit/iquit](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/iquit)