



LIES OF A DRUG USER

This article explores the lies teens tell about drugs and what parents can do to get over their hurt and anger to keep their child safe.

Kids Lie, and Parents believe them. A group of researchers wanted to know how common it is for teens to lie about drugs. They asked 400 teenagers if they used cocaine, then took hair samples to test for traces of the drug. Even though they knew their answers were private, and that the drug test would prove them right or wrong, most teens who had cocaine in their systems denied using it. The hair samples revealed drug use 52 times more often than the teens admitted. The fact that teens lie even when they know they'll get caught doesn't surprise Mason Turner, MD, chief of psychiatry at Kaiser Permanente San Francisco. "Most teens don't think about what comes next," he tells WebMD. "Concerns about the future don't enter into their decision making."

6 Tips for Parents of Teens If your child is lying about using drugs or alcohol. Looking the other way is a dangerous mistake. Study after study shows that parents' involvement plays an important role in preventing adolescent drug use. And the earlier the problem is addressed, the better your chances of containing potential damage.

Here are six things you can do.

1. Trust your instincts. Turner sees many parents discount their concerns about their child's behavior. They say things like, "I'm probably just being an obsessive parent." Or "Maybe I'm being hypersensitive." But parents know their children. "If a parent's gut is telling them something is off, there has got to be a reason,". If the cold or cough syrup in your medicine cabinet disappears or gets used up, ask about it. Over-the-counter cough medicines contain dextromethorphan, an ingredient teens can drink in excess to get high. Cagey behaviour may have a simple explanation or a serious cause. Perhaps your child is stressed over schoolwork. Maybe she had a fight with a friend. Or she could have a problem she's afraid to talk about. Turner counsels parents to make it as easy as possible for their teens to talk to them. Start by asking what is going on. Talk about specific things you see and concerns you have, and then be ready to listen.

2. Educate yourself. Julie Unwin saw her middle-school son become increasingly sullen and withdrawn. "In my gut I believed something was wrong," she says. "But I thought, if he was using

drugs I would see a physical sign.” The Unwins' son didn't come home slurring or with bloodshot eyes because he wasn't using alcohol or marijuana, at least not at first. There might have been signs, but his parents didn't know what to look for. Drugs rise and fall in popularity over time. It's possible you have never heard of your child's drug of choice. With time and research you can get to know the different substances available to kids today. The web sites drugfree.org or drugabuse.gov have drug guides that describe commonly abused substances and their effects.

3. Don't take it personally. If you find out your child is lying about drugs, you may see red. You may feel hurt, angry, guilty, and betrayed. All of these emotions are understandable. And none of them will help you help your child. “First, recognize that lying is a normal teen behaviour,” advises Turner. He goes on to say that normal or not, parents can and should teach their kids that lying is unacceptable. Your conversation with your child could cover the following ground: Explore the reasons your child lied Understand what is going on Let your child know that lying is not OK Talk about how to be honest in the future

4. Get help. A lot of parents try to keep their child's drug use within the family. The idea that addiction reflects badly on the family keeps a lot of kids out of treatment until the problem is too big to ignore. Like diabetes or a broken bone, treating drug abuse requires expertise most parents don't have. If your child is using drugs, you'll have your hands full, even with a professional involved. Start by talking to your family doctor or paediatrician. The counsellor at your child's school may be able to recommend specialists or treatment centres that can help both you and your child.

5. Leave room to rebuild trust. When parents don't trust their kids, problems like drug abuse can snowball. Strained parent-child relations typically cast a negative tone on any and all interactions. Families tend to do fewer things together, leaving kids fewer opportunities to feel connected to their parents. “Parents need to build a safe space for the child, while also defining boundaries and limits,” says Turner. Try not to let the lies you've been told overshadow every conversation you have with your child. “So many kids in our groups say, ‘I never get a chance to talk. My parents cut me off all the time,’” says Hedrick. Open, two-way conversations can reinforce your child's awareness of your family values and make the idea of drugs less appealing.

6. Expand your parenting style. “A lot of parents are at one end of the spectrum or the other: overly permissive, or overly aggressive,” says Turner. Substance abuse requires a variety of parenting styles. Sometimes your child will need you to be warm and loving. Other times, you will have to enforce rules your child considers unfair.