



FamilyDay® | Making Everyday Special

Family Day Parent Toolkit: Making Everyday Special



 **Center on
Addiction**

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Introduction to the Family Day Parent Toolkit

In 2001, Center on Addiction created Family Day. What started as a grassroots initiative to inform parents about the benefits of frequent family dinners has grown into a national movement. Today, Family Day celebrates the simple, everyday things parents do with their kids, like sharing a meal, playing a game or discussing their day.

Parents Can Make Everyday Special

The simple, little things you do with your kids make a big difference. These activities create strong, healthy relationships that can prevent future drug use.

This guide, developed by Center on Addiction, a trusted authority on addiction research, includes a variety of tools to help you foster and maintain this type of warm, supportive relationship.

It is important to act now. The earlier you start connecting with your kids, the better. If your kids aren't used to talking to you about what's going on in their lives when they are 8 or 10, it's harder to get them talking when they are 12-14.



Connecting with Your Children

Connecting with your children can be challenging. Many parents report that they ask their children, “How was your day?” only to get back a one word answer like, “Good,” “Fine,” or “Okay.” While some kids are very open and talkative with their parents, others are not. In that case, parents ask, “How can we get our child to open up and share more about their day?” This section of the toolkit provides you with easy ways to help your children open up to you, beyond one word answers.

Simple Ways to Connect With Your Children

Effective Communication is Key

Ask Specific Questions

Instead of asking, “How was your day,” ask your child questions about how they are feeling or what they are doing instead. Children like to know you are involved in their life and there to listen. The more involved you are, the more you will connect. Research shows that children feel valued when they know you want to hear about their problems and successes.

Positive Talk

Try to use positive language when communicating with your child. Remember, you are their biggest influence, and the language you use will often be the language your child uses. Positive language will help you both maintain and strengthen your bond.

Listen

Ask your children for their opinion and listen to what they have to say. When they know you value their opinion they will be more confident in their own decisions.

Employ an “Open Door Policy”

Encourage your children to come to you when they’re facing a problem. Give them positive feedback, but also give them the space to learn and grow on their own. Providing positive feedback will help them make good decisions and become more independent.

Say “I love you”

Tell your children, “I love you,” every day, not just on special occasions. Always telling your children you love them is a certain way to let them know you care – and that your love isn’t conditional.

Communicate Frequently with Your Children

Children are navigating new ground as they learn to be independent. In their teenage years, they may eventually pull back from talking with you and begin relying more on their friends. This is the time to keep up your efforts to communicate. Let them know you are there to talk. Ask questions, listen and validate their feelings when they share them. Make it your goal to have open and honest daily conversations that allow your children to feel loved and respected.



Connecting with Your Children

Lead by Example and Provide Mentorship

Inspire Confidence

Remind your children of their best qualities. Children don't feel as valued unless you tell them what they do well. They need to hear what makes them special. Celebrate their accomplishments, even the small ones. Giving praise for strengths and their efforts will make them more confident, and help prepare them for bigger challenges. Placing value on their positive qualities and not just their achievements can also help them build resilience and self-worth in the face of failure.

Share Your Experiences

One way to connect with your children is to relate one of your own childhood experiences to something your children are currently experiencing. For instance, tell them about the first time you learned how to ride a bike and the emotions you experienced. When your children know you've gone through something similar, it makes them feel more at ease. Children, like adults, appreciate empathy.

Let Your Children Know "It's Okay to Make Mistakes"

When your children make mistakes or are feeling down, spend time offering comfort and validating their experiences and feelings before jumping into problem solving or offering advice. Try problem solving together, but let them take the lead so they build confidence in their own abilities.

Plan Ahead

Plan Time Together as a Family

Planned activities provide a focused outlet for your child, allowing them to develop and for you to grow closer. Children value structure, and when you're the one providing it, it encourages bonding.

Help Out

Inviting your children to get involved in your everyday activities, such as cooking, cleaning, or taking care of errands can be a great way to connect. Children enjoy teamwork and want to feel like a valuable part of the family.

Get Involved

Volunteer to help your children study for a test or prepare for a sports tryout. Show them their interests are your interests. Your children need to know you care about what inspires them. This makes them feel more secure in their choices and abilities. The more you invest in their interests, the more motivated they'll be to accomplish their goals.



Conversation Starters

In this section, we provide tools for enriching and strengthening conversations with your children. We have developed a series of conversation starters you can use, organized by age. The conversation starters were designed to make it especially hard for your child to reply with one-word answers!

Try these out with your children. We invite you to share your successes, tips, challenges and even failures with us on our Family Day Facebook page.

Easy Questions for Busy Families

Elementary School (Ages 8-10)

Favorites

- Who is your best friend? Why is he/she your best friend?
- What is your favorite subject in school? Why?
- What is your favorite holiday? Why?
- Who is your favorite superhero? Why?
- Who is your favorite teacher? What does he/she do that makes you happy?

Likes

- What games do you like to play during recess? Do you like playing alone or with friends?
- If you could be a character from a fairy tale, who would you be?

- What's the funniest joke you have ever heard?
- If you could have any pet, what animal would you pick?
- What do you like most about our family?
- What's the luckiest thing that has ever happened to you?

Future Aspirations

- What do you want to be when you grow up? What about that makes it sound like fun?

Middle School (Ages 10-12)

Favorites

- Who is your favorite musical artist? Why?
- What is your favorite book? Why?
- What is your favorite thing to do with your friends?
- Who is your personal hero? Why do you admire them?
- Who are your favorite teachers? How do they inspire you?

Open Ended Questions

- How would you describe your perfect day?
- If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?
- What do you like most about yourself?
- What qualities do you value most in a friend?

Future Aspirations

- What do you want to be when you grow up? What do you think it takes to become that?

Simple Family Activities

In addition to finding new ways to spark meaningful and engaging conversation with your kids, we've developed a series of interactive games and activities that can help you further connect with your child. These materials were created to put many of the concepts outlined in the Simple Ways to Connect with Your Children section of the toolkit into action. Through these downloadable activities, you can share some of your own experiences, enjoy quality time as a family, inspire confidence, be a great listener and continue to have frequent communication with your child.



Share stories and photos showing how your family enjoyed this activity on our Facebook page.



Family Activity #2: Our Family Favorites

Do you know what your children's favorite things are? Do your children know yours? For many families, asking a series of questions about your favorites can be a fun and sometimes enlightening experience! Did you know all the answers to your children's questions or were you able to learn something new?

Directions

1. Fill in the blanks in the heart with answers to each question below.
2. Color the heart and hang this sheet on your fridge so everyone who visits will know what your family favorites are!

What's your family's...

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 ...favorite activity to do together? | 5 ...favorite color? |
| 2 ...favorite snack? | 6 ...favorite sports team? |
| 3 ...favorite movie? | 7 ...favorite restaurant? |
| 4 ...favorite day trip? | 8 ...favorite day of the week? |

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

6 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____



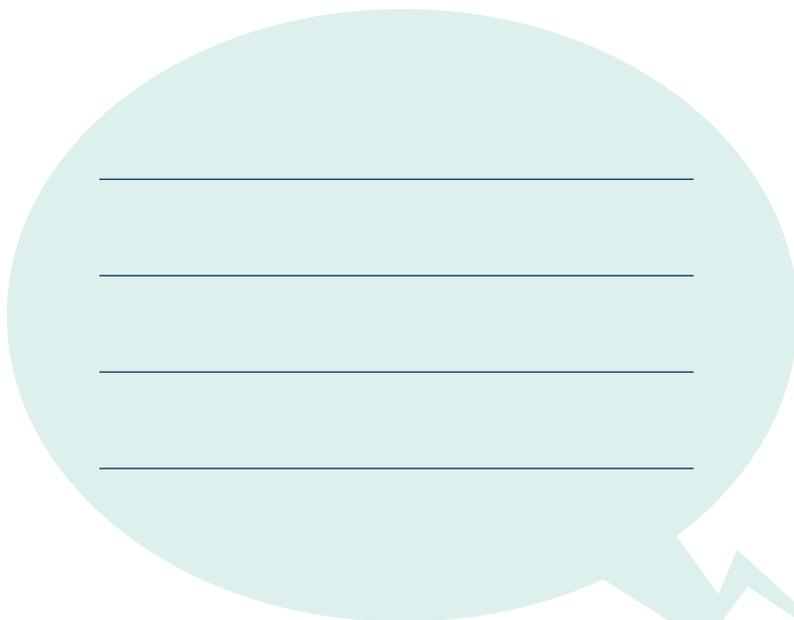
Family Activity #3: Be Your Own Hero!

Children and adults are drawn to tales of superheroes, often because of what they stand for: values and characteristics like **hope, justice, courage, strength** and **determination**. This worksheet is meant to help you and your children become your own superheroes by identifying your unique values and strengths. Then as a family, decide what superhero characteristics each person can contribute to forge a super-family!

My Superhero Identity

1. Make a list below of your own unique “super powers” that help you save the day, help good win over bad, and be an example for others. These can be things like skills, strengths, positive characteristics, or values that are important to you.
2. Come up with a superhero name.
3. Draw your superhero on the next page and write in their name above the picture!

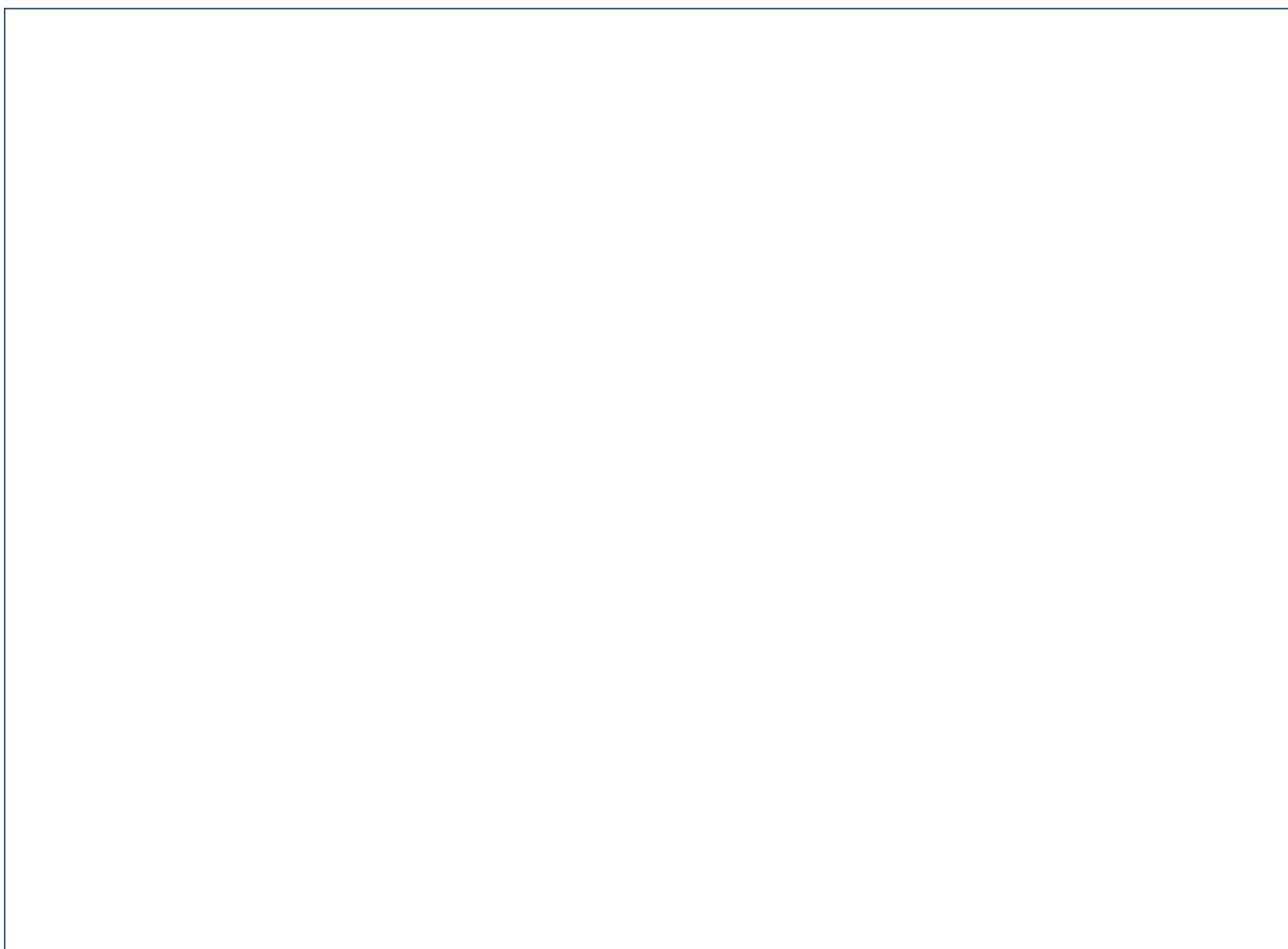
My special super powers are:



Family Activity #3: Be Your Own Hero!

My Superhero Name is:

Draw your superhero below!



Family Activity #5: Family Interviews

This activity asks families to pretend you have your own TV or YouTube show and set up family interviews with two sets of questions: one for parents to ask kids and one for kids to ask parents. You will each get a turn to host the show. You may be surprised by what you learn about each other.

Kids, ask your parents these questions:

1. What was your favorite cartoon growing up?

2. What was your favorite sport and why?

3. What was your favorite book when you were a kid?

4. What activity did you enjoy the most with your friends?

5. What was your favorite subject in school?



Family Activity #5: Family Interviews

Parents, ask your kids these questions:

1. Where would you love to go on vacation?

2. Who is your favorite person in school?

3. What is your favorite subject in school?

4. What is your favorite family photo?

5. What new activities are you looking forward to trying this year with our family?



Family Activity #6: Showing and Growing Gratitude

Spending time each day focusing on what you're grateful for and sharing it with your family can help you feel more positive and connected.

Every day this week, have each family member write down three positive experiences from their day. It can be small or large, things they did, things they witnessed in others, or even something in nature. Each night (or at the end of the week), get together and share the good things along with a reflection answering one of the questions below:

- **Why this good thing happened**
- **What this good thing means to you**
- **What you can do tomorrow to enable more of this good thing**
- **What ways you or others contribute to this good thing**

Date:

Good Thing #1

Good Thing #2

Good Thing #3



Family Activity #7: Gratitude Jar

Taking time to think about what you're grateful for can help build positive emotions and happiness. Find an empty jar and then cut up some pieces of notebook or computer paper for each family member – each person needs about 7 pieces. Every day that week have your family write one thing they're thankful for and place it in the jar. Make sure the jar is in a place where everyone will be able to easily locate it. Find a time at the end of the week to come together and take turns reading aloud what the family has put into the gratitude jar.



Preventing Drug Use

The next few sections of the guide explain how you can take what you've learned so far and apply it to preventing drug use in your child. Connecting with your kids early, during elementary and middle school, will better prepare you for what is to come in high school. Among the many challenges you will face is this: almost every high school student will be offered drugs or alcohol before graduating. The good news is that you are actually one of the biggest factors in whether your child will drink or use drugs.

We've touched upon why connecting with your children early is so important. The same rule applies to conversations about drugs and alcohol. Many parents want to wait for the right time, but these conversations should start when your kids are young. Look for teachable moments and opportunities in everyday life. In these early years, before age 10, we suggest the message be simple – drugs and alcohol can hurt your body and you should not use them. Your children will accept this without question.

Things change by 5th and 6th grade. Your kids are starting to learn about drugs and alcohol from TV, advertising and their friends. During middle school, parents should start discussing the specific dangers of drugs, including addiction, and harms to the brain and body.

The next three sections of the toolkit contain more information to help you have these conversations, including:

- Background information for parents on substances
- Tips for talking to kids about substance use
- Conversation starters for initiating the conversation



Background Information for Parents about Substance Use

Many parents have awkward memories from when their own parents tried to talk to them about drugs and alcohol, while others report their families never actually spoke to them about this topic.

Whatever your personal experience, we know the conversation can be tough. We've developed background information about drugs and alcohol – based on the latest science – so you are armed with the accurate information before discussing substance use with your kids.

It is also important to note that even if your parents did have a conversation with you, the science and what we know to be true about drugs and alcohol continues to evolve. What you learned years ago may no longer be true. As such, the more informed you are about what's facing your kid today regarding drugs and alcohol, the better equipped you will be to discuss the subject with your kids.

Substance Use 101: A Backgrounder For Parents

- **Addiction is a complex brain disease.** Decisions adolescents make about substances now can have important consequences later. Those who begin using substances in their early teens are more likely to develop a substance use disorder later in life. Talk to your children about how tobacco, alcohol and other drugs can impact their brain health and development.

- **Teens are exposed to excessive promotions for alcoholic products like beer, wine, vodka and sweetened or flavored alcoholic drinks daily.** How substance use is depicted in the media – including music, TV shows, movies and social media sites – can all have an influence on children's perceptions of alcohol and other drugs. Talk with your children about what they see on TV, in magazines or social media platforms. Help your child develop critical thinking skills to analyze media messages about drugs, alcohol and tobacco products.
- **Peer pressure and the need to feel accepted may play a role in a child's decision to use tobacco, alcohol and other drugs.** Talk to your children about whether their friends use and how they can handle situations where they might feel pressured. Let them know it's normal to want to fit in, but it's more important to learn to make decisions in line with their values, despite what others are doing.
- **Teens can tell when you are not telling the truth.** Be honest and present facts. Drugs, including tobacco and alcohol, may make them feel good for a moment, but that feeling is brief. By using alcohol or other drugs, they are putting themselves at risk for serious consequences, both now and in the future.
- **Have a conversation about your children's goals and discuss how substance use will get in the way of them achieving those goals.** Explain that using substances can have long-term consequences – negatively affecting memory, relationships, academics, and more.





- **As children get older they are more likely to be exposed to alcohol and other drugs.** Ask your child if they've seen peers using drugs at school or if they were offered tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs at a party with friends. Talk about what they should do in those situations.
- **Children are less likely to use substances when they know their parents do not approve.** Discuss your rules and expectations in advance, and talk about what consequences will be enforced if they don't follow those rules.
- **Talk to your children about positive adult role models.** Identify members in your community that your children can talk to if they have a question about substance use.
- **When you talk to your children about not smoking, drinking, or using other drugs, tell them if a family member has suffered from addiction.** Use this as an opportunity to discuss how addiction affects everyone involved.
- **If your child is approaching the age when they will learn how to drive, talk about the dangers of driving under the influence.** Let them know that this behavior puts them and others at risk. Tell them that your number one concern will always be their safety. Let them know that if they find themselves in a risky situation (i.e., if they're in need of a sober ride), they can always call you for help.



Tips for Talking to Kids about Substance Use

Parents undoubtedly want to prevent their kids from using drugs, but aren't sure what to say. We hear questions like, "Should I talk openly to them about it?" or "Is it okay for them to use alcohol only in the home under my supervision?" Understandably, parents have many thoughts about what they should or shouldn't say. This isn't a conversation parents should improvise, though many do.

We suggest that you make it clear during the conversation that you expect your children not use drugs, but above all, you want your children to tell you what's going on around them so you can guide them safely through. You should also talk about why people get drunk and high despite the risks.

This section of the guide provides specific tips for talking to your kids about substance use. Try these tips out with your kids and share your successes, challenges and even failures with us on our Facebook page.

Tips for Talking to Kids About Substance Use

1 Set Limits.

Be clear, direct and honest when setting limits. Let your children know you do not want them using substances, and lay out the specific consequences if they break that rule. Explain your reasons for not wanting them to use substances and engage them in a conversation about the harmful consequences.

2 Bring It Up.

Make talking with your children about substance use a natural part of your continuing discussion with them, rather than just a onetime event. It shouldn't be a taboo subject that no one in your household wants to broach.

3 Focus on the Facts.

When discussing alcohol and other drugs, be honest and focus on the facts. Educate yourself about dangers of teen substance use and show them you are a good source of information they can come to in the future.

4 Challenge Social Norms.

Challenge any misconceptions your child has about alcohol or drugs (e.g. "Everybody experiments," or "Marijuana isn't addictive"). Tell your child that we know a lot more today about the dangers of smoking, drinking, and drug use for teens than we did years ago. Highlight that it may take years to fully understand how dangerous newer drugs or things like e-cigarettes are for teens and why it is best to avoid them completely.



Tips for Talking to Kids about Substance Use

5 Find Teaching Opportunities.

Use news, TV shows, online videos, or real-life situations as teaching opportunities. Children and teens are bombarded daily by advertising and media messages about alcohol and drugs. Talk with your children about the media's influence and encourage them to think critically about these messages.

6 Be Honest.

If your child asks about your history of substance use as a teen, don't lie. It is best to either be honest or to choose to keep parts of your own experiences private. Focus the conversation on why your child is asking. If you're talking about your own history, focus on your goal of helping them avoid substance use. Don't share more than necessary; focus on what you've learned since you were a kid, and ways you hope they can learn from your mistakes.

7 Maintain an Open Dialogue.

You want your child to feel safe telling you the truth, even if it might be upsetting. This includes the truth about a friend. Remind your child that being a good friend means letting someone know if you are concerned your friend might have a problem with drugs or alcohol.

Interested in more tips for talking to your kids about drugs?

- [How to Raise a Drug-Free Kid: The Straight Dope for Parents](#)
- childmind.org/article/talk-teenager-substance-use-abuse/
- www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you/parent-resources/five-conversation-goals



Substance Use Conversation Starters

The following substance use conversation starters were created to help get your children to open up and talk to you about their knowledge and exposure to drugs and alcohol.

We suggest starting these conversations early, when your child is in fifth or sixth grade, which may be earlier than you would have imagined. Kids who use drugs in high school tell us that they started using them around age 13.

As parents, we try to protect our kids, but research shows that most kids are exposed to drugs and alcohol at an early age through social media, the Internet, TV or their friends. By seventh and eighth grade, students reported that some of their classmates were already using drugs and alcohol.

Try these out with your children. We invite you to share your successes, tips, challenges and even failures with us on our Facebook page.

Questions to Start the Talk about Drugs and Alcohol

Perceptions and Understanding

- Do you know what binge drinking is? What do you know about it?

- What do you know about why someone your age is more likely to get addicted to cigarettes, alcohol, or other drugs?
- When you hear or see messages about alcohol and drugs, how do you decide what are myths and what are facts?
- Why do you think marijuana (in most states) and various other drugs are illegal? Why do you think legal drugs like alcohol and tobacco are still illegal for teens?

Friends and Peers

- What would you do if you saw a friend taking prescription pills that are not prescribed to them?
- Do you know any friends or kids at school that you think drink too much or have a problem with drugs?
- What do the kids at your school do at parties?
- If you were at a party with kids who were smoking, drinking or using drugs, how would you feel? How would you handle it?
- How often do you hear kids talking about cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs at school?
- How would you feel if you saw a friend drunk or high? What would you do?

Open Ended Questions

- Besides family members, who do you feel most comfortable talking to about cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs? Why?



Connect with Us

Thank you for using the **Family Day Parent Toolkit**. We hope you understand how much power you have when it comes to preventing substance use. While addiction can strike any family – regardless of ethnicity, affluence, age or gender – making time to connect every day, even for a few minutes, can have a big impact on your children. To learn more about our program please visit CASAFamilyDay.org and sign up for our newsletter.

If you have any questions about the contents contained in the toolkit, please contact familyday@centeronaddiction.org.