

# Facts for Families: Tobacco And Kids

Children's addiction to nicotine from cigarette smoking, smokeless tobacco (chew), and cigars is a major public health problem.

## The *Facts* about teen smoking:

- Nearly 3 million U.S. teenagers smoke.
- Approximately 3,000 teenagers start smoking every day and one-third of them will die prematurely of a smoking related disease (American Cancer Society).
- High school students who smoke cigarettes are more likely to take risks such as ignoring seat belts, getting into physical fights, carrying weapons, and having sex at an earlier age.
- Tobacco is considered to be a Gateway drug@ which may lead to alcohol, marijuana, and other illegal drug use.
- Most adult smokers started smoking before the age of 18.
- Tobacco use continues to be the most common cause of preventable disease and death in the United States.
- Cigarette smoking and tobacco use are associated with many forms of cancer.
- Smoking is the main cause of lung and heart disease.
- Smoking worsens existing medical problems, such as asthma, high blood pressure and diabetes.
- The earlier a person starts smoking, the greater the risk to his or her health and the harder it is to quit.

## Children at MOST risk for Tobacco use:

- have parents, siblings, or friends who smoke
- exhibit characteristics such as toughness and acting grown up
- deny the harmful effects of tobacco
- have fewer coping skills and smoke to alleviate stress
- have poor self esteem and depression
- have poor academic performance, especially girls
- are very influenced by advertisements that relate cigarette smoking to being thin and/or suffer from eating disorders

## What Parents can do to prevent Tobacco use:

- Parents are role models. If you smoke, quit. If you have not quit, do not smoke in front of your children and tell them you regret that you started.
- Do not allow smoking in your home and strictly enforce your No Smoking rule.
- Ask whether tobacco is discussed in school.
- Ask about tobacco use by friends; compliment children who do not smoke.
- Do not allow your children to handle smoking materials.
- Do not allow your children to play with candy cigarettes. They are symbols of real cigarettes, and young children who use them may be more likely to smoke.
- Support school and community anti-smoking efforts and tell school officials you expect them to enforce no smoking policies.

- Make tobacco less readily available to children and teens Csupport higher taxes on tobacco, licensing of vendors, and bans on unattended vending machines.
- Discuss with your children the false and misleading images used in advertising and movies which portray smoking as glamorous, healthy, sexy, and mature.
- Emphasize the short-term negative effects such as bad breath, yellowed fingers, smelly clothes, shortness of breath, and decreased performance in sports.
- Emphasize that nicotine is addictive.
- Help children to say "No" to tobacco by role playing situations in which tobacco is offered by peers.

**If your child or teen has already begun to use tobacco, the following steps can help him or her to stop:**

- Advise him/her to stop. Be non-confrontational, supportive, and respectful.
- Assist his/her efforts to quit and express your desire to help.
- Provide educational materials.
- Help your youngster identify personally relevant reasons to quit.
- If you smoke, agree to quit with your child and negotiate a quit date.
- Enlist the child's pediatrician or family physician to help the child stop smoking.
- If the child is abusing other drugs and/or alcohol or there are problems with mood or other disorders, evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other mental health professional may be indicated.