The dinner table is one of the most important places in the house for improving the health of your family, but not only in the way you might be thinking. Use this guide to keep your kids safe by starting a conversation over dinner about the risks of using alcohol and drugs.
Research shows that kids who have dinner with their families are 50% less likely to drink alcohol or use drugs.

EVERY DAY FAMILIES AROUND THE COUNTRY SIT DOWN TO HAVE THIS CONVERSATION.
SHOW YOU'RE A PART OF THE CONVERSATION BY POSTING A PICTURE OF YOUR EMPTY PLATE ON YOUR FAVORITE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM USING:
#NightOfConversation

WHY AN EMPTY PLATE?
BECAUSE ON THIS NIGHT THE CONVERSATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE FOOD.
TALKING TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS MIGHT JUST SAVE THEIR LIVES.

GETTING KIDS TO OPEN UP ABOUT WHAT’S HAPPENING IN THEIR LIVES CAN BE DIFFICULT, AND GETTING THEM TO TALK ABOUT ALCOHOL AND DRUGS MAY SEEM EVEN HARDER. FORTUNATELY, IT DOESN’T HAVE TO BE.

This guide will take you through the steps you need to know to start the conversation by providing questions and guidance based on the best research. This guide is based on the Surgeon General’s Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health titled: *Facing Addiction in America*. Just like the landmark Surgeon General’s Report on smoking and tobacco that helped lay the groundwork for protecting America’s Health from tobacco, this report is set to do the same to help change our national conversation on addiction.

This guide takes the key issues in the Surgeon General’s Report, including the science showing the effects of substance use on the brain, prevention of substance misuse, and treatment and recovery from substance use disorders, and puts them into a format that can help you put this knowledge into action in your own dining room.

The conversation is broken up into several steps and each one has questions for you to ask your child and guidance for providing accurate information and encouraging the discussion.

To help get things started, we’ve created an infographic to help illustrate the problem of substance use. Both you and your child can use this to start to understand how big a problem substance misuse and addiction is, why it happens, and how to prevent it.

Be sure to review the discussion guide before you start the conversation with your family. You will want to take some time to think about how you will ask and answer the questions that come up. We have more research from the Surgeon General’s Report on doctoroz.com in case you need it.

This is a big topic that is worth discussing with your family on an ongoing basis, not just on one night. We’ve provided a list of resources on doctoroz.com that can help you tonight and every other night to keep the conversation going.
**THE ADDICTION CRISIS**

- **20.8 MILLION** people ages 12 or older have a substance use disorder.
- **ONLY 1 IN 10** receive the specialty treatment they need.

**MOST PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLERS ARE OBTAINED FROM A FRIEND OR RELATIVE**

- **54%** Friend or Relative
- **40%** Other
- **26%** Doctor
- **10%** Other

**40%** believe that prescription drugs are "much safer" to use than illegal drugs.

Research suggests that 4 out of 5 heroin users start out with prescription drugs.
Both legal and illegal drugs can be addictive.

In America,

- 27 million Americans currently use illicit drugs or prescription drugs for non-medical reasons.
- 18 out of 10 people with substance problems started using the age 9.
- 2 million people in the U.S. have an addiction to prescription opioids.
- Drug overdoses kill more than cars and guns.

Every year, that substance use is delayed during adolescent brain development, the risk of addiction decreases.

Kids are at high risk.
DISCUSSION GUIDE

STEP 1
Let’s Start Talking

QUESTIONS
WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT ALCOHOL AND DRUGS AT SCHOOL, ON TV, OR ONLINE?
HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEAR ABOUT ALCOHOL AND DRUGS?

GUIDANCE
Parenting is one of the most rewarding jobs for any mother, father, or caregiver. It can be tough, though, especially when it comes to difficult conversations. Preventing drug and alcohol misuse starts with a safe environment and honest conversations. When talking to your kids about alcohol and drugs, it’s important that everyone feels safe sharing his or her thoughts and opinions. You want to make it clear that your children can come to you to talk about alcohol and drugs, without fear of punishment. Families can help protect their kids by creating a strong bond between children and parents, ensuring parental involvement in the child’s life, and establishing clear limits and consistent practice of discipline.

STEP 2
The Science behind Alcohol and Drug Use and Substance Use Disorders

QUESTIONS
HOW DO ALCOHOL AND DRUGS AFFECT YOUR BRAIN AND BODY?

GUIDANCE
The repeated use of alcohol and drugs can result in substance use disorders. Substance Use Disorders are not the result of bad behavior; they are actually classified as a chronic brain disease that is not only progressive, but can sometimes be fatal. The most severe form of a substance use disorder is often called addiction. Alcohol and drugs produce pleasurable feelings - or a “high” - because of chemicals that transmit messages between nerve cells in the brain. Repeated use of alcohol and drugs changes brain circuits, and individuals can develop a tolerance to a substance. Many people don’t realize that prescription drugs can be just as dangerous as illegal drugs, and you should make this clear to your children. Adolescent brains are more vulnerable to the effects of drugs and alcohol. Alcohol and drug use also has long-term effects on the body. Heavy alcohol use can lead to hypertension, liver disease, and cancer, regular marijuana use is associated with chronic bronchitis, and use of stimulants such as cocaine can lead to heart disease.
**Preventing Alcohol and Drug Misuse**

**QUESTIONS**
- What would you say if someone offered you alcohol or drugs?
- In what situations are you most likely to encounter alcohol and drugs?
- What can you do if you are in a situation where alcohol and drugs are being used?

**GUIDANCE**

There are several risk factors that may make children, adolescents, and adults vulnerable to misusing alcohol and drugs and developing substance use disorders. Understanding this risk can help everyone take steps to prevent substance misuse and addiction. While a person’s risk for developing a substance use disorder is in part genetic, many social and family factors interact with a person’s genes to increase their risk. These can include living in a home where parents or other caregivers use substances, including tobacco, having friends who misuse alcohol or drugs, or living in neighborhoods and going to schools where alcohol and drug use are common. The age of first alcohol or drug use is an important risk factor, and preventing or even delaying the first time a child tries alcohol or drugs can deter substance misuse and addiction. Protective factors may counter risk factors and help prevent alcohol and drug use. Protective factors can give people the resources and strength to avoid substance use, and may include having strong and positive family ties and social connections.

**Treatment for Substance Use Disorders and Recovering from Addiction**

**QUESTIONS**
- Do you know what addiction means? Do you think people can stop using alcohol and drugs?
- Where do people go to get help?

**GUIDANCE**

Many of us know someone with a substance use disorder or have lost or nearly lost someone addicted to alcohol or drugs. Despite this, many view substance use disorders as a personal flaw or moral weakness. This is not true; substance use disorders are not a moral failing, but a chronic disease – just like diabetes and hypertension – and require treatment and recovery support. Many people do stop using alcohol and drugs, enter recovery, and live wonderful productive lives. Making sure your children have the best information on substance use disorders, how they are treated, and how recovery is achieved is the first step in dispelling myths about addiction and setting a positive and hopeful tone for recovery.

**Creating a Supportive Environment**

**QUESTIONS**
- Should we have rules about alcohol and drugs in our house?
- What can I do to help you understand the risks of using alcohol and drugs?
- How can I support you in making good decisions?

**GUIDANCE**

Show you care about your child’s happiness and well-being. Young people are more likely to listen when they know you’re on their side. Try to reinforce why you don’t want your child to drink or use drugs – not just because you say so, but because you want your child to be happy and safe. Explain that developing healthy coping skills, such as creative, social, and sports activities, can be better than using substances when they are angry or frustrated.
Having the conversation tonight helped build your child’s skills and strategies for avoiding inappropriate alcohol and drug use. Even if your child doesn’t want to drink or use drugs, peer pressure is a powerful thing. It could be tempting to use substances just to avoid looking uncool. So don’t let the conversation end. To prepare your child to resist peer pressure, you’ll need to keep talking and help them build skills and practice them.

This conversation doesn’t end tonight. Use this guide and its resources throughout the year to keep the conversation going and help reduce your kid’s risk of getting addicted to alcohol and drugs.

If you’ve gotten this far, congratulations! You’ve taken an important step to protecting the health of your family. Health and happiness start at home and talking to your kids about alcohol and drugs can have a major positive impact on their lives.