



The Silent Epidemic: Protecting Children/Teenagers from the Vaping Crisis

We live in an age where the pressures and stresses surrounding raising a child multiply daily. Within this whirlpool, a new, yet sneaky, crisis is presenting in ways that threaten children's well-being and demand undivided attention. These kids are trapped in a dangerous vaping epidemic that is quickly taking hold of our youth. The allure of the new electronic devices is not to be underestimated, and the dangers of e-cigarettes to children are far worse than we realize.

At first glance, the vaping device might seem harmless. Slim and compact, and often disguised as a USB drive or highlighter, these devices are engineered for concealment, making it easy for a child to hide a habit from his parents or a teacher. The array of alluring flavors – fruit medleys and dessert-inspired concoctions – effectively mask the reality of what is being inhaled. But make no mistake: the vehicles of vaping are a serious threat to our children's health and futures.

The underlying problem is nicotine, a highly addictive substance hazardous to developing brains. While some of the most popular vapes among kids contain no nicotine, most of their devices contain the equivalent of 20 cigarettes. This is no harmless habit or passing phase; it's a pipeline to a lifelong addiction. Nicotine exposure during adolescence can alter brain development, affecting attention, learning, and susceptibility to future addictions. We're not just talking about a buzz but about potential alterations to children's brains.

In addition, the perception that e-cigarette aerosol is just 'harmless water vapor' is a myth. Each puff exposes children to a toxic brew of chemicals. E-cigarette aerosol contains metals, carcinogens, ultra-fine particles, and other volatile substances. It's not yet clear what the long-term health consequences of all these substances are, but so far, the picture is disturbing. We are allowing children to serve as guinea pigs for a massive health experiment, the results of which might not be apparent for years – or even decades.

We must be on guard. Vaping can be covert. However, if you know what to look for, these are some telltale signs: an unexplained sweet smell on your child's breath, a charging cord, or a USB-like device you haven't seen before. When it comes to behavior, watch for an increase in coughing or clearing of the throat, unexplained nose bleeds, or the appearance of mouth sores. A sudden change in school performance or, for athletes, a sudden change in athletic performance, extreme mood swings, or sudden irritability and anger are also signs.

Next, **YOU MUST TALK TO YOUR KIDS**. This is not a one-time talk. This calls for an ongoing dialogue. Have these talks casually, perhaps while driving together or preparing dinner. Ask your child open-ended questions and let them talk about what they know. A question such as 'What do you know about vaping?' or 'Why do you think kids choose to start vaping?' can get the ball rolling.

Many kids have been the targets of sophisticated corporate marketing campaigns meant to deceive children into addiction. Vape companies have spent millions of dollars on ad campaigns to get a new generation hooked on their products, employing tactics such as social media ‘influencers and youth-culture imagery to make it look calm and safe. If you find out your adolescent is vaping, don’t judge. Offer help! Just Say Something, and our partners have resources to help.

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conversations about **drugs** and **alcohol**

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