



# Talking to teens about smoking

## a guide for parents and carers

An ASH Scotland resource, supported by Children 1st.

One of the key pieces of advice for talking to teens about any issue is to **be credible**. In this resource ASH Scotland provides parents and carers with the high quality and up-to-date information needed to talk to teens about smoking.



### Tips for talking to teens

There are lots of excellent resources for parents and carers on talking to their teens about issues such as drugs, alcohol and sexual health. Most of this advice would apply to smoking too.

- [www.children1st.org.uk](http://www.children1st.org.uk) have some excellent advice on risk-taking behaviours and how to talk to your teenager.
- [www.parentingacrossscotland.org](http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org) are a great source of advice for top tips for parenting teenagers.

You know your teen best and how they might respond to different messages, but here are a few things to keep in mind:

- take time to read through this information first
- keep calm and don't just bombard them with facts
- don't lay down the law, but do let them know if you are concerned
- plan what you want to say, be understanding and listen to them
- pick the right moment to have an open discussion.

**Top tip!**  
Don't use out-dated punishment techniques to put your teenager off smoking, like making them smoke continuously until they are sick.

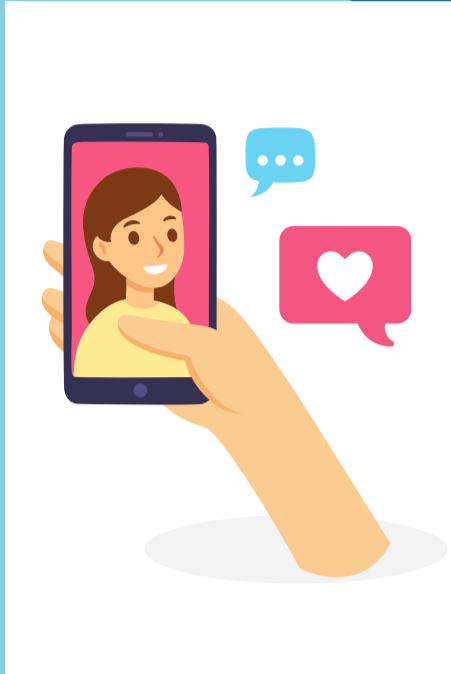
These don't work, they are dangerous and not likely to help your relationship in the long run.

### MOST YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T SMOKE

Teenagers are hugely driven by peer approval, it can be helpful to keep reminding your teen that most young people don't smoke and most adults never smoke. In fact, smoking, drinking and taking drugs are not as common as you might think amongst young Scots.

It does help to be cautious, a substantial proportion of those who smoke are more likely to also drink or use drugs.

It's often not as simple as 'falling in with the wrong crowd' - a lot of things influence a young person's decision whether to smoke or not.

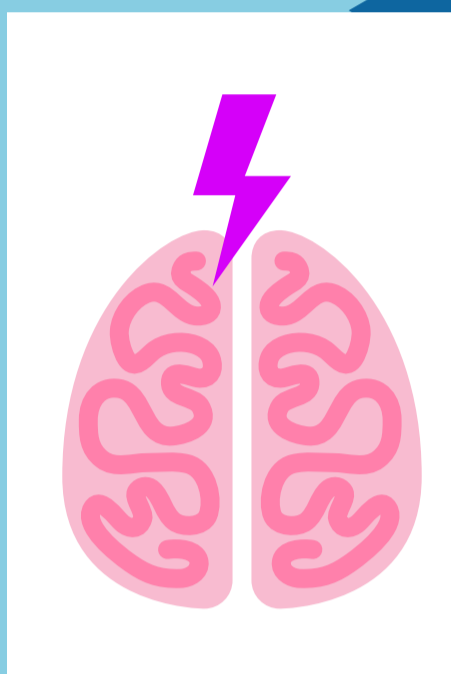


### ADDICTION

Understanding what's behind your teen's behaviour can help you respond in a way that helps them manage it.

Teenagers' brains are still developing and they get addicted to the nicotine in cigarettes much faster than adults do. They find nicotine more rewarding, underestimate the risks of smoking, and are more influenced by smoking behaviour around them.

Nicotine is highly addictive, so someone who smokes has to deal with cravings, feelings of stress and irritability that keep coming back. On top of this, not all of the connections in teenagers' brains are fully formed and their moods can change rapidly.



### PHYSICAL HEALTH AND FITNESS

The earlier a smoker starts, the more health damage it causes and the harder it is to quit.

That's why it's important to talk to young people about the dangers of smoking; it's easier to equip them with the confidence to stay smoke-free, or quit, when they're young than when the habit is more established.

Smoking causes serious harm to physical health and wellbeing.

Even smoking small amounts or being a social smoker can have a serious impact on fitness and ability to exercise. If your teen is into sports or is particularly athletic, let them know that smoking will affect their performance.



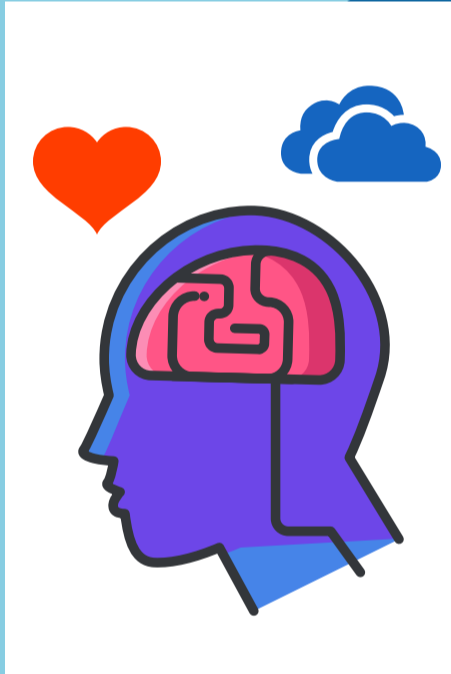
### MENTAL HEALTH

Teenagers are facing lots of pressures and expectations and for many it can be a time of worry, insecurity and uncertainty.

Sometimes teenagers will say that smoking helps them with feelings of stress, anxiety and low mood but this is a common misconception. What feels like stress relief is usually relief from nicotine withdrawal and feeds the cycle of addiction.

Quitting smoking can be good for mental health.

Stopping smoking is associated with improvements in depression, stress and anxiety (compared with continuing to smoke). There's lots of free help to stop smoking available from [www.quityourway.scot](http://www.quityourway.scot).



### IT'S EXPENSIVE

Smoking is an expensive habit - even the cost of occasional smoking quickly adds up.

Encourage your teen to think about other ways they could spend their money; clothes, holidays, driving lessons, gaming, concerts etc.

The average smoker in Scotland has 12 cigarettes a day, at £10 for a pack of 20 this would quickly add up to **£187.50 a month or £2190 a year.**



### THE LAW

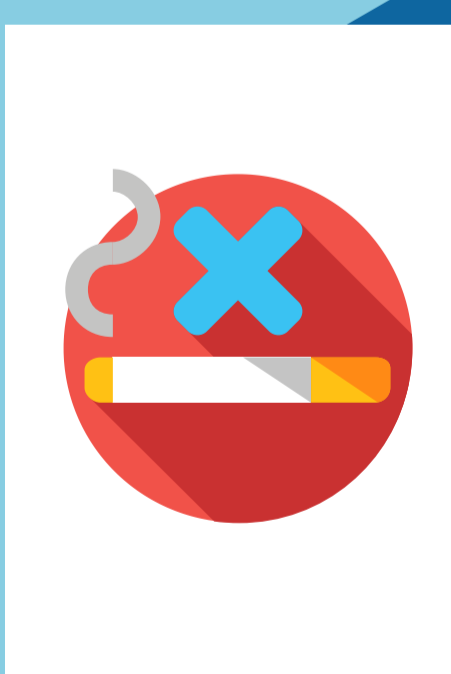
Because of changes happening to their brains, it's harder for teenagers to think about the consequences of their actions. For some young people (particularly those thinking about next steps in education and work), it can be helpful to remind them what the law says about smoking.

Don't get too intense or hung-up on punishments, but explain the law is there to protect children and young people because smoking is harmful.

In Scotland it's illegal:

- for shops to sell tobacco or vapes to under 18s
- to buy tobacco or vapes for people underage (this is called proxy purchase)
- for under 18s to try to buy tobacco products themselves
- to smoke in enclosed or partially enclosed public spaces
- to smoke in a car if it has a passenger who is under the age of 18.

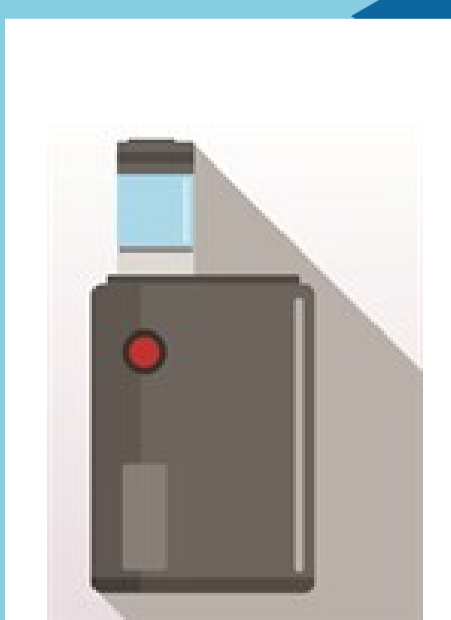
If a police officer suspects that someone under 18 is in possession of tobacco products in a public place then they can confiscate them.



### E-CIGS AND VAPING

Most of us are now aware of Nicotine Vaping Products (aka vapes or e-cigarettes). Although e-cigarettes are less harmful than smoking tobacco, it's still important to discourage young people from experimenting with them. There are a few reasons for this:

- vaping is not risk-free and there is a lot we still don't know about the long term health effects of e-cigarettes
- most vapes contain nicotine, which is addictive. We don't want teenagers to be recruited into nicotine use
- there are concerns that e-cigarettes may attract non-smokers, creating a new route into smoking for young people
- vapes are an age-restricted product and the laws on buying and selling them to under-18s are the same as cigarettes.



### More information and support

#### Parents

[www.children1st.org.uk](http://www.children1st.org.uk) from moments of crisis, to everyday challenges Children 1st Parentline can help.  
[www.notafavour.scot](http://www.notafavour.scot) why giving tobacco or vapes to young people isn't doing them a favour.

#### Young people

[www.young.scot](http://www.young.scot) information for young people, helping them to make informed decisions and choices.  
[www.befree.scot](http://www.befree.scot) lets young people know the benefits of being smoke-free; *being fitter, happier and better off.*



Quitting smoking can be tough. Scotland's free and friendly stop smoking services can hugely increase chances of successfully quitting and staying stopped for good. [www.quityourway.scot](http://www.quityourway.scot)

