For Parents:

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEEN ABOUT QUITTING

How Tobacco Affects Oregon Youth and Families.

NO SMOKING.
NO VAPING.

Supporting a young person in quitting tobacco requires patience, understanding, and good communication. Many teens are hesitant to ask for help with smoking or vaping. Understanding why – and knowing how to approach the conversation – can make a huge difference. This section is for parents (and other caregivers) who want to help a teen quit. We'll cover common reasons teens avoid asking for support, tips for productive conversations, and example dialogues you can use to get started.

WHY TEENS MAY HESITATE TO ASK FOR HELP

If your son or daughter is vaping or smoking, they might not come to you for help even if they want to quit. Here are some reasons why:

Fear of Punishment or Judgment: Many teens are afraid they'll get in serious trouble or be lectured if they admit to vaping or smoking. They might hide their habit to avoid angering or disappointing you. This fear can keep them from asking for support to quit. They may worry you'll be so upset about the rule-breaking that you won't understand what they're going through.

Shame and Guilt: Teens often feel ashamed about being addicted to nicotine. They know it's harmful and may feel guilty for doing it, especially if they've promised to stay smoke-free. Admitting they're struggling (or that they "gave in" to peer pressure) can be really hard. Rather than feel embarrassed, some teens prefer to pretend everything is fine.

Belief They Should Handle It Themselves: Adolescents are in a phase of seeking independence. Your teen might think, "I got myself into this, I'll get myself out." They may underestimate how hard quitting can be and think they don't need help. Or, they might be in denial about being addicted ("I can stop anytime…"). This pride or denial can stop them from asking parents or doctors for assistance.

Fear of Losing Vaping/Smoking as a Coping Tool: If your teen uses nicotine to deal with stress, anxiety, or social situations, they might be afraid to let it go. The idea of quitting could make them anxious – "How will I handle my nerves or fit in with friends without it?" If they see vaping as their stress relief or a social crutch, they may not ask for help because deep down they're not sure they're ready to quit yet.

Peer Influence and Social Image: Peer pressure might have been what led them to start, and peers can also discourage quitting. A teen may worry that involving a parent will lead to restrictions like not seeing certain friends. They might also fear being seen as "weak" by friends if it comes out that they needed help or decided to quit. In some circles, vaping or smoking is viewed as "cool," so asking a parent for help could feel like betraying their social group.

If the Parent Smokes or Vapes: In families where a parent or relative also smokes/vapes, a teen might feel it's hypocritical for that adult to tell them to quit. They may think, "Why should I quit if you haven't?" or they might assume you won't strongly enforce quitting. On the other hand, they could also fear disappointing you if you've struggled to quit yourself. In either case, the parent's own tobacco use can complicate the teen's willingness to ask for help. (We'll discuss more below about parents quitting as a positive example.)

Understanding these possible feelings can help you approach your teen in a compassionate, non-judgmental way. Your teen may actually want support – almost half of youth who vape say they want to quit – but they need to feel safe coming to you. The goal is to open the door for honest communication and let them know you're on their side.

TIPS FOR EMPATHETIC AND EFFECTIVE CONVERSATIONS

When you're ready to talk to your child about quitting, keep these evidence-based tips in mind:

Stay Calm and Open-minded: Manage your own emotions first. It's normal to feel upset or worried if you discover your teen is vaping or smoking. But approaching them with anger, shame, or panic will shut down the conversation fast. For example, a parent who immediately yells and issues punishment ("You're grounded, how could you do this?!") will likely drive their teen into hiding. Instead, take a deep breath and aim for a calm, understanding tone. Let them speak and really listen. Show that your first priority is their well-being, not delivering consequences. Teens are more likely to open up if they feel heard rather than judged.

Pick the Right Moment: Timing and environment matter. Don't ambush your teen in the middle of a busy or stressful moment. Choose a relaxed, private time to talk – maybe during a casual drive, a quiet moment after dinner, or whenever you usually have low-pressure chats. Ensure you have enough time and no immediate distractions. One father who suspected his son was vaping waited until dinner to bring it up casually, rather than confronting him immediately upon finding the device. A natural segue (like seeing a vape shop sign or a relevant news story) can help introduce the topic gently (). The idea is to make the conversation feel more like a two-way talk and less like an interrogation.

Begin with Questions, Not Accusations: Start by asking questions and inviting your teen's perspective, instead of scolding or lecturing. For example, you might say, "I've noticed some vape chargers in your room. Can we talk about that? I'm not here to punish you – I really want to understand what's going on." Or even more generally, ask their views: "What do you think about vaping? Is it common at your school?" By asking open-ended questions ("What have you heard about e-cigarettes?"), you give your teen az chance to share their thoughts and knowledge. This also helps you gauge how much they know about the risks. Avoid accusing language like "I know you're doing this behind my back…" which will make them defensive. Keep your tone curious and concerned, not angry.

Don't Make It a Lecture: While it's important to share facts, try not to launch into a one-sided lecture. Teens tune out lectures, especially if they feel they're being talked down to. Instead, have a conversation. After asking what they know, fill in the gaps with clear, factual information. For instance, you could gently mention: "I read that most vapes contain nicotine, which can actually change teen brain development. Were you aware of that?" Keep your statements non-judgmental. You can express concern for their health: "I'm worried because I care about you and your health." Emphasize you're coming from a place of love, not anger. It's okay if the chat is short or if your teen doesn't say much at first. The key is keeping the door open for future talks.

Acknowledge Their Feelings and Reasons: If your teen does share why they started ("I was stressed," "All my friends do it," etc.), validate their feelings before urging them to quit. For example: "I get that you were curious and that it helped you feel less anxious at parties. I know you weren't trying to get addicted." This doesn't mean you condone it – it means you understand why they tried it. Teens are more receptive when they feel understood. Recognize the peer pressure factor: you might say, "It's tough, I know a lot of people your age are vaping and it can seem normal." If they say they enjoy vaping, acknowledge that too: "I understand it might feel good in the short term." Then you can segue into gently correcting misconceptions (like "But I learned that relief is only temporary and it can actually increase stress later."). By showing empathy for their experience, you reduce their defensiveness and increase their willingness to consider quitting.

Avoid Criticism and Scare Tactics: It's important not to call your teen names ("How could you be so stupid?") or use exaggerated scare tactics ("Your lungs will completely fail by next year if you keep this up!"). Harsh criticism or fear-based approaches (like the old "fried egg" anti-drug ads) often backfire. Teens can feel invincible and may brush off overly dramatic warnings. Instead of trying to terrify them with distant worst-case scenarios, focus on immediate, relatable downsides: for example, point out how nicotine can affect their sports performance (breathing) or even their appearance (tooth stains, acne, bad breath) in the near term. You can mention true stories of young people getting lung injuries from vaping, but do so in a factual, calm way. Emphasize facts over fear. And rather than shame them, empower them – make it about health and strength, not punishment or disappointment.

Express Confidence in Them: Make sure your teen knows that you believe in their ability to quit. Nicotine addiction can make them feel powerless or ashamed. Encourage them by highlighting their strengths: "I know you're strong – when you set your mind to something, you do it. I believe you can beat this addiction, and I'll help however I can." Let them know quitting might take time and multiple tries, but that's normal and okay. If they've ever overcome another challenge (like improving grades or training for a sport), remind them of that success as proof they can do hard things. Feeling understood and supported by you will increase their confidence to take on quitting.

Set Clear Expectations (Without Ultimatums): You can and should make your stance on tobacco clear: for instance, firmly state that you want them to quit and that you'll help them do it. Be explicit: "I do not want you vaping or smoking – it's too dangerous. My expectation is that we work together so you can stop." However, pair this clear message with support, not with strict ultimatums like "Quit right now or you're grounded for a year." Threats can make a teen rebel or simply hide their use better. Instead, focus on problem-solving together. Let them know you will enforce boundaries (for example, no vaping allowed at home and you might remove certain privileges if they keep using), but emphasize that the reason is your love and concern, not control. It's a fine balance: be strong in disapproving of the behavior, but avoid attacking the person. For example: "I love you no matter what. I hate what vaping is doing to you and I'm not okay with it continuing. Let's find a way to stop it."

Involve Them in Making a Plan: Encourage your teen to take an active role in planning their quit attempt. People are more committed to plans they help create. Ask questions like, "What do you think would make quitting easier for you?" or "When do you feel you most want to vape, and what could we do instead at those times?" This collaborative approach shows respect for their input. Help them brainstorm coping strategies for cravings or peer pressure. For example, together come up with some responses to friends who offer a vape: like "Nah, my mom would kill me if she found out" (using you as an excuse) or "No thanks, I'm training for basketball so I can't". Role-play these if your teen is willing – it can boost their confidence to say no. Also, ask if they'd like your help in removing temptations (such as getting rid of their vape devices) or if they prefer to do that themselves. By treating them as a partner in the process, not just a child being told what to do, you empower them to take ownership of their quit journey.

"We're in This Together": Make it clear that they are not alone – you are there to support them, not punish them. Use encouraging language: "We will figure this out" and "I'm here for you every step." If you smoke or vape, consider using this opportunity to quit together. Be honest that you know how hard it is. For instance, "I'm a smoker too, and I wish I had never started. I'm going to try quitting as well, so we can support each other." In fact, if you are a parent who smokes, the best thing you can do for your child is to quit smoking yourself. It sets a powerful example and removes any mixed messages. Talk to your teen about how difficult quitting is even for you and how you regret starting – this can reinforce how addictive these products are, without "lecturing." If you're not ready to quit, at least never smoke/vape around them, and never supply them with tobacco. Show that you take this seriously for the whole family's health.

Keep the Conversation Going: One talk likely won't solve everything. View this as the first of many small talks. Set realistic expectations that quitting is a process and your teen might slip up – but they should keep trying. Make sure they know they can come to you if they falter: "If you vape again or slip, please tell me – I won't be mad. We'll just restart together." Praise any positive steps they take, no matter how small. Continuing to check in ("How are the cravings today?" or "I'm proud of you for trying this week") shows your ongoing support. If the initial conversation didn't go great, don't be discouraged – give it a bit of time and try again, perhaps in a different way. What matters most is that your teen knows you love them, you're proud of them for trying to quit, and you'll help them find resources and strategies to succeed. With consistent empathy and encouragement from you, they will be much more likely to quit successfully.

EXAMPLE CONVERSATION STARTERS AND DIALOGUES

Sometimes it helps to see how a supportive conversation might actually sound. Below are a couple of sample dialogues to illustrate techniques from the tips above. You can adapt these to your own style and situation.

DIALOGUE 1:
DISCOVERING YOUR TEEN IS VAPING

Scenario: A mother has just found a vape device hidden in her 16-year-old daughter's backpack. She wants to address it calmly that evening.

Mom: (Gently, after dinner) "Honey, I was putting your laundry away and I came across this." (She places the vape on the table between them.) "I know what it is – it's a vape pen. First, I want you to know I'm not here to yell at you. I am worried, though. Can we talk about this? I'd really like to understand what's going on."

Teen: (Looks down, tense) "I… it's not mine. I was just holding it for a friend." (She's clearly uncomfortable.)

Mom: "Okay. I appreciate you talking with me. I've been reading a lot about vaping because so many kids are doing it. I learned that most of these have nicotine and can hurt developing brains. I have to be honest, it scares me to think of you using this."

(She keeps a calm tone. The daughter doesn't respond yet.)

Mom: "Look, you're almost an adult and I respect your choices. I'm not here to punish you. I'm here to help. If you're vaping, I want to help you stop – because I love you and I want you healthy. Have you been vaping a lot?"

Teen: (Teary-eyed, she decides to be honest) "Mostly at school with friends… I'm sorry. I didn't think I'd get hooked. I just… I kind of like it. It helps with my anxiety sometimes."

Mom: (Moves closer, puts a hand on her daughter's shoulder) "Thank you for telling me. I'm not angry at you. I am relieved you told me the truth. I get that it might feel like it helps your anxiety, but nicotine actually can make anxiety worse over time. It's so sneaky – it makes you feel better for a few minutes, then it creates more stress in your body so you feel like you need it again."

Teen: "I have noticed I get super nervous in class if I can't vape. And I hate that… I hate that I'm craving it."

Mom: "That's the addiction talking. Nicotine is incredibly addictive, especially for teens. It's not your fault – these companies literally design it to get you hooked. I read that the tobacco industry even makes sweet flavors to manipulate people your age into using their products. It makes me angry that they targeted you."

Teen: "Yeah, me too, now that you say that. I feel kind of used."

Mom: "Right? So let's channel that anger into getting you free of it. Quitting might be hard, but we can do it. What do you think? Do you want to try to quit vaping?"

Teen: "…Yeah. I do. I'm just scared it's going to be really hard."

Mom: "It might be hard, I won't lie. But you have me in your corner. We'll get help, we'll make a plan. You are not doing this alone. How about this – tonight, we'll throw this vape away together. And this weekend, we'll go to the pharmacy or call the quitline to see about nicotine gum or patches if you need them. We'll figure out some ways for you to handle anxiety that don't involve vaping – I can get you a stress ball and we can try short walks or deep breathing when cravings hit. Does that sound okay?"

Teen: (nods) "Yeah. Thanks, Mom… And I'm sorry."

Mom: "You don't need to keep saying sorry. I'm so glad you're willing to try. I'm proud of you. I know you can do this, and I'll be here every step. We'll check in each day, okay? I love you."
(They hug. The vape pen is disposed of, and they proceed to work on the quit plan.)

Why this works: The mother stays calm and non-judgmental, prioritizing understanding over scolding. She invites honesty by explicitly saying she's not going to punish her daughter. When the teen admits to using, Mom listens and empathizes ("I get that it helped your anxiety"). She provides factual info about nicotine's effects and expresses anger at the industry, not at her child, which helps motivate the teen (now she feels wronged by tobacco companies too). Mom offers concrete help (disposing of the vape, getting nicotine gum, finding stress alternatives) and partnering with her daughter, showing the teen she's not alone. The teen feels supported and is more likely to follow through with quitting with her mother's guidance.

DIALOGUE 2:
ONGOING SUPPORT AND DEALING WITH SLIPS

Scenario: A father and his 17-year-old son have already talked about quitting smoking. The son agreed to try quitting and hasn't smoked for a week, but then he had a slip and smoked a cigarette at a party. He's afraid to tell his dad, but the dad notices something is off and initiates a follow-up conversation.

Dad: "Hey, I wanted to check in about how you're doing not smoking. I know it's been about a week. How are you feeling?"

Teen: (Looks ashamed) "I was doing okay… but last night I kind of messed up. I had a cigarette at Jake's party. I'm sorry, Dad. I feel like I failed."

(He looks down, expecting disappointment.)

Dad: (keeps voice gentle) "I'm really glad you told me. Listen, you did not fail. Quitting nicotine often takes several tries. One slip doesn't erase the progress you made. Remember when I quit smoking a few years ago? I slipped up a couple times too before I finally stopped for good."

Teen: "Yeah, I remember. You kept trying."

Dad: "Exactly. The fact you went a whole week is awesome – that's the longest you've gone without smoking since you started, right? That's a win. Let's talk about what happened. What made you decide to smoke at the party?"

Teen: "All my friends were smoking out back. I said no at first, but after a while I just gave in. I guess I wasn't prepared for that pressure."

Dad: "Peer pressure is tough. Maybe we can come up with a plan for next time you're in that situation. What if you step away and text me, or have an excuse ready? Like you could say, 'Nah, I'm good – I promised my dad I wouldn't.' You can totally blame me."
(smiles) "Or maybe bring some gum or a vape-free friend to hang with so it's easier to resist."

Teen: "Those are good ideas. I think if I'd taken a minute away last night, the craving might have passed. It was super strong for like 5 minutes, then it got better. I should've just waited it out."

Dad: "Cravings really do pass. We read that urge surfing exercise – riding the wave of the craving till it crests and goes away. It's a skill we can keep practicing."

Teen: "Yeah. I threw out the rest of that pack this morning, by the way. I don't want to start again."

Dad: "That's great. I'm proud of you for that. How about we set another goal – try to go another week smoke-free? And this time, if you're going to a party where people might smoke, maybe we check in by text during it. You can send me a □ when you're resisting, and I'll send back a □□ to cheer you on."

Teen: (chuckles) "Haha, okay that could work. Thanks, Dad. I thought you'd be mad."

Dad: "Nope, not mad. I'm happy you're still committed. Remember, the only goal is to keep at it. Even if it takes a few tries, we'll get there. You have what it takes. And I'm here for you no matter what."

Why this works: The father creates a safe space for his son to admit a relapse by remaining calm and supportive – the teen voluntarily confesses, which is a big deal. Dad explicitly says one slip isn't failure and reminds the son that quitting often takes multiple attempts. By sharing his own past struggles with quitting, he normalizes the challenge and avoids anger. They analyze the trigger (friends smoking) together and brainstorm coping strategies (excuses to leave, texting Dad, having gum) for next time, which prepares the teen for future temptations. The father praises the teen's week of success to keep him motivated and expresses pride in him for continuing to try. This positive reinforcement, coupled with concrete planning, makes the teen feel encouraged rather than ashamed. It strengthens their trust – the teen sees that being honest and trying again is met with support, not punishment. This makes him more likely to ultimately quit for good, knowing his dad has his back.

SPECIAL NOTE FOR PARENTS WHO SMOKE OR ARE QUITTING TOO

If you as a parent also smoke or vape, your involvement in your teen's quitting journey is even more influential. Set the best example you can. Ideally, consider quitting together with your teen – this can be a powerful motivator for you both. As the American Lung Association notes, parents who smoke are far more likely to have children who smoke, so quitting can greatly benefit your kids. Talk to your teen about your own efforts: explain that you know firsthand how addictive nicotine is and that you don't want them to go through the decades of struggle you did. Show empathy – you truly understand the cravings they feel. If you're actively quitting, share your progress ("I made it 3 days, it's hard but I'm doing it") and any tips that help you (perhaps chewing gum or exercising). This creates a team atmosphere.
If you're not ready or able to quit yet, be honest about it and still set boundaries: don't smoke or vape in front of your teen, keep all tobacco products out of reach, and never offer them a cigarette or vape (even if they ask). Make your home and car 100% tobacco-free zone – this protects your family and reinforces that you take quitting seriously. You can tell your teen, "I'm not proud that I smoke, and I don't want this for you. I'm going to keep trying to quit, but even while I'm still working on it, I refuse to let you get hooked like I did." Kids do listen to these messages, especially if delivered with sincerity rather than hypocrisy. Your support and understanding, combined with a commitment to your own health, will create a stronger foundation for your teen to quit successfully.