

Parents talking about their own drug use to children could be detrimental

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Parents know that one day they will have to talk to their children about drug use. The hardest part is to decide whether or not talking about ones own drug use will be useful in communicating an antidrug message. Recent research, published in the journal *Human Communication Research*, found that children whose parents did not disclose drug use, but delivered a strong antidrug message, were more likely to exhibit antidrug attitudes.

Jennifer A. Kam, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Ashley V. Middleton, MSO Health Information Management, published in *Human Communication Research* their findings from surveys of 253 Latino and 308 European American students from the sixth through eighth grades. The students reported on the conversations that they have had with their parents about alcohol, [cigarettes](#), and [marijuana](#). Kam and Middleton were interested in determining how certain types of messages were related to the students' substance-use perceptions, and in turn, behaviors.

Past research found that teens reported that they would be less likely to use drugs if their parents told them about their own past drug use. In Kam and Middleton's study, however, Latino and European American children who reported that their parents talked about the [negative consequences](#), or regret, over their own past substance use were actually less likely to report anti-substance-use perceptions. This finding means that when parents share their past stories of substance use, even when there is a learning lesson, such messages may have unintended

consequences for early [adolescent children](#).

Kam and Middleton's study identifies specific messages that parents can relay to their children about alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana that may encourage anti-substance-use perceptions, and in turn, discourage actual substance use. For example, parents may talk to their kids about the negative consequences of using substances, how to avoid substances, that they disapprove of substance use, the family rules against substance use, and stories about others who have gotten in trouble from using substances.

"Parents may want to reconsider whether they should talk to their kids about times when they used substances in the past and not volunteer such information, Kam said. "Of course, it is important to remember this study is one of the first to examine the associations between parents' references to their own past [substance use](#) and their adolescent children's subsequent perceptions and behaviors."

Provided by International Communication Association

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