



# NICOTINE = BRAIN POISON

[FlavorsHookKids.org](http://FlavorsHookKids.org)

# THE RUNDOWN

Vaping has upended much of last decade's public health progress reducing tobacco and drug use among kids. A study by Monitoring the Future reported that the jump in vaping among 10th and 12th graders from 2017 to 2018 is the largest on record, for any substance. In fact, the U.S. Surgeon General has classified vaping a youth epidemic. How did we get here? Three simple reasons.

**The flavors make it easy to hit.**

**The devices make it easy to hide.**

**The nicotine makes it hard to quit.**

Use this guide to help navigate how to keep kids healthy and nicotine-free in the age of a vaping epidemic. With these resources and tips, we'll work together to get California's public health strides back on track.

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# HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT VAPING

## LISTEN

Whether or not your kids or students have tried vaping, they'll benefit from a good talk. And a good talk starts with listening. Let the kids tell you about their world. These starter questions are a simple way in:

**Do you have friends who vape?**

**Are you curious about it?**

**Have you been offered?**

**Have you tried it?**

**If so, what made you say yes?**

**If not, what made you say no?**

Before you tell kids what you think, find out from them what it's like to be a kid in a culture where underage vaping surrounds them. A conversation will work harder than a lecture.

## MANY TALKS VS ONE BIG ONE

Have an ongoing dialog rather than a single talk. The temptation to vape is not a one-time occurrence, so the conversation shouldn't be either. Help kids understand that as they age through middle and high school, they'll face new challenges, and through it all, you'll be there to talk through smart, healthy life choices.

## TALK SCIENCE

Mostly what kids (and adults) know about nicotine is that it's addictive. But addiction is only the beginning. Kids should know that nicotine also alters their brains in the area responsible for attention and learning, making it harder for them to carry out tasks and stay focused on their work. It makes it easier for them to get addicted to other drugs down the road. And, as if teen years weren't hard enough, nicotine can also increase anxiety, mood swings, and irritability.

## BLAME FLAVORS

How has vaping grown so fast? Blame flavors. In California, almost 90% of all high school students who vape report using flavors. And flavors have been found to lower teens' perception of harm. Help your kids understand there's nicotine, aerosol, and toxic chemicals in these fun sounding flavors. And the nicotine content on the package is not necessarily accurate. The flavored tobacco industry is still mostly unregulated, so there's no way to be sure their claims are true.

# WHAT KIDS SAY

Here's how to respond to things kids might say.

## **KID:**

Vaping is a safe alternative to smoking.

## **ADULT:**

There's actually nothing safe about vaping. It's not water vapor like some people think. The vapor is actually aerosol found to contain metals, particulates, and toxic chemicals. And the nicotine content of that aerosol can be very high.

## **KID:**

Nicotine's just a little buzz, that's all.

## **ADULT:**

Nicotine does release dopamine in the brain, which might make you feel good temporarily, but don't be tricked. Nicotine is a neurotoxin, meaning, it's a poison affecting the brain, especially developing brains of kids.

## **KID:**

I thought I was vaping just flavoring.

## **ADULT:**

You're not alone. It's not obvious to kids, or even grownups, that something so sweet and fruity is actually an addictive drug that can have long-term effects on kids' developing brains.

## **KID:**

You used to smoke.

## **ADULT:**

Yeah, and I wish I'd had conversations like these before I got hooked. Most tobacco users have tried to quit at least once. Some have tried many times. Breaking free of nicotine can be a long, frustrating road. I don't wish that on anyone, least of all you.

# KNOW THE SIGNS

— Do you notice artificial smells from behind closed doors like candy, popcorn, vanilla, or fruit flavoring?

— Are there school supplies or tech products you don't recognize in kids' backpacks or rooms? How about small vials or eye dropper bottles?

— Have you come across unfamiliar chargers, coils, or batteries?

— Are there any unfamiliar charges on credit card statements?

— Have there been changes in your kids' behavior such as increased mood swings, irritability, anxiety, or impulsivity?

— Are your kids suffering from more frequent headaches or nausea?

# WHAT IF YOUR TEEN IS ADDICTED?

## CALL THE HELPLINE

The California Smokers' Helpline provides professional counseling in six languages. Counselors are trained to talk to either kids or parents about youth tobacco use, and effective strategies for quitting. Call to better prepare yourself to help your teen quit. And have your kids call, too. They can talk to a counselor on their own for personalized attention. Help is available by phone 1-800-NO-BUTTS; or by live chat at [nobutts.org](http://nobutts.org)

## DOWNLOAD THE APP

Encourage kids to download the first of its kind e-cig quitting app, [thisisquitting.com](http://thisisquitting.com). It puts teens in a community of their peers who are also trying to quit. Text messages tailored to age groups are sent to their phones at crucial moments. Parents and teachers can also use the app to see what kids are seeing and better support them offline. Visit [thisisquitting.com](http://thisisquitting.com) for more.

## IDENTIFY SIDE EFFECTS

Help motivate kids by pointing out the negatives of nicotine use. They may not realize that emotional challenges and difficulty with attention and learning could be nicotine-related. Let kids know nicotine can increase the following:

- Irritability**
- Mood swings**
- Anxiety**
- Impulsivity**
- Learning difficulties**

## ENLIST THE PEDIATRICIAN

Ask your healthcare provider to talk to your teen. Hearing about the harm of e-cigs from a health professional can make an impact.

## BE SUPPORTIVE

Quitting is hard. And as many nicotine addicts and recovering addicts will tell you, it usually takes more than one try. Stay positive with your teens. Reward the incremental progress and accept the setbacks as part of the process.

# HOW TO GET SCHOOLS ON BOARD

## CONTACT THE ADMINISTRATION

Email or visit schools and ask about their tobacco-free policy and their approach to teen vaping. How to start the conversation? Here's a list of questions from tobacco use prevention experts in the California Department of Education:

**Has the school adopted a tobacco-free policy? Most schools have them, but not all. Among other things, a tobacco-free policy defines the meaning of "tobacco product" to include e-cigarettes, and lays out enforcement and other implementation procedures.**

**What is your school doing to help educate students and inform parents about these products? For example, is the school hosting educational sessions or activities on e-cigarettes/vaping for parents and students?**

**Do teachers and school staff know what the different e-cigarette/vaping products look like? These devices are changing all the time!**

**Do school nurses and school counselors know where to refer teens for quitting help? Share information about the Helpline 1-800-NO-BUTTS and the quitting app for teens at [thisisquitting.com](http://thisisquitting.com).**

**Ask your Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) to address the teen vaping epidemic in their communications to the school community.**

**Have schools share [FlavorsHookKids.org](http://FlavorsHookKids.org) and other resources on their Facebook pages, websites or email announcements to parents.**

## SHARE WIDELY

Pass along this guide to other parents wanting to protect kids from this widespread youth epidemic. Print out this PDF and circulate, send the PDF in an email, or link people to [FlavorsHookKids.org](http://FlavorsHookKids.org)

## ATTEND MEETINGS

Get a group together and attend PTSA or school board meetings to voice your concerns. Have the following ten facts in your back pocket.

# TEN FOR TEENS

Going to meetings? Writing to the school board? Reference these ten facts to ground your audience in the reality of teen vaping, and to make perfectly clear what's at stake.

**U.S. Surgeon General named vaping a youth epidemic.**

**E-cig usage by high school students rose 78% between 2017 and 2018. That's close to double the kids exposed to nicotine in a single year.**

**Nicotine is one of the most toxic of all poisons.**

**Nicotine rewires teens' developing brains.**

**Nicotine can escalate anxiety, mood swings and learning difficulties.**

**Teens are at a higher risk of addiction than adults.**

**Nicotine in adolescence makes it easier to develop addiction to other drugs.**

**None of Juul's pods are without nicotine, but 5 out of 8 young Juulers were not aware of that.**

**A single Juul pod can contain the nicotine of a pack of cigarettes and may deliver nicotine to the brain 2.7 times faster than other e-cigs.**

**Changes to the brain from nicotine can be permanent.**



# ACTIVITIES WITH TEENS

## GOOGLE IT

Naturally, we want to help teens find their own motivation for giving up vaping, or to not start in the first place. Lucky for us, teens are natural skeptics – and digital natives. So googling Juul’s early marketing efforts, paired with Juul’s claim they never meant to market kids, might help your teens see themselves as targets, and refuse to play along.

Before you sit down with your teen to google Juul’s initial marketing, take a second and familiarize yourself. Knowing the facts ahead of time will help you lead the exercise. The good news is that Stanford researchers did all the digging and saved you the time.

[Download the PDF](#) and see what Juul was up to from the very beginning.

What to point out to kids?

**Youthful models**

**Their body language**

**Their outfits**

**Sex appeal**

**The styled out backgrounds**

**Hashtags all over social media**

**Juul’s presence at music fests**

**Juul’s free sampling events**

Ask teens to decide for themselves who they think Juul was trying to reach. Can they sniff out the hypocrisy? Do the same for Suorin, Bo, Phix, Kandypens, or any tobacco company your teen wants to stress test.

## HISTORY REPEATING

Did you know that tobacco companies have long been regulated by the federal government for targeting kids? In the 70s, cigarette commercials were taken off the air. In the 90s, the cartoon “Joe Camel” was abolished. And in 2009, flavored cigarettes (except menthol) were federally banned. [Visit the Smithsonian site](#) to give teens a glimpse of the past and to show them how the e-cig industry is using Big Tobacco’s playbook.

## BIG KIDS UNITE

Maybe teens want a shot at impacting the epidemic themselves. The need to address vaping at the middle school level is getting more dire. Who better to inspire middle schoolers than high schoolers? Connect with California’s [Friday Night Live](#) for inspiration on how teens can tackle this health topic. Or have the teens reach out to their school administrators or counselors for other ways to get involved. It could be a science or health project, or could be applied to community service hours. Ask your teens if they’d be up for putting those leadership skills to work for California’s greater good.

# POISON LOOKS LIKE THIS

A visual guide for some modern  
vaping devices.



**JUUL**



**JUUL  
PODS**



**SUORIN  
DROP**



**BO  
ONE**



**PHIX**



**KANDYPEN**

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## [Talk with Your Teen About E-cigarettes: A Tip Sheet for Parents](#)

Source: Office of the U.S Surgeon General and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office on Smoking and Health.

## [What You Need to Know And How to Talk With Your Kids About Vaping](#)

Source: Partnership for Drug-Free Kids

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