Be prepared to answer if your child asks, “Did you ever use drugs?”

Among the most common drug-related questions asked of parents is “Did you ever use drugs?” Unless the answer is “no,” it is difficult to know what to say because nearly all parents who used drugs don’t want their children to do the same thing. Is this hypocritical?

No. We all want the best for our children. Today we have more information and we understand the hazards of drug use better than we did when we were their age and thought we were invincible. To guide our children’s decisions about drugs, we can now draw on credible real-life examples of friends who had trouble as a result of their drug use: the neighbor who caused a fatal car crash while high; the family member who got addicted; the teen who used marijuana for years, lost interest in school, and never really learned how to deal with adult life and it’s stresses.

Some parents who used drugs in the past choose to lie about it, but they risk losing their credibility if their children discover the truth. Many experts recommend that when a child asks this question, the response should be honest.

This doesn’t mean that parents need to recount every moment of their experiences. As in conversations about sex, some details should remain private, as you should avoid providing more information than is actually sought by your child. Ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand exactly why and what a child is asking before answering questions about your past drug use, and limit your response to that information.

This discussion provides a good opportunity for parents to speak frankly about what attracted them to drugs, why drugs are dangerous, what they know now that they didn’t know then, and why they want their children to avoid making the same mistake. There’s no perfect way to get this message across, only approaches that seem more fitting than others.

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