

Talking to young people about vaping

A guide for parents and carers



Acknowledgements

Publisher

Cancer Institute NSW
Level 4, 1 Reserve Road
St Leonards, NSW 2065
Locked Bag 2030
St Leonards NSW 1590

T: (02) 8374 5600

E: information@cancer.nsw.gov.au

W: cancer.nsw.gov.au

SHPN: (CI) 260382

HPRM: E26/12075

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Aboriginal artwork by Carissa Paglino.



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

NSW Quitline is committed to better health outcomes for Aboriginal communities; and aim to work with Aboriginal people to reduce the high smoking rates that occur as a result of colonisation.

We advise this resource may contain images, or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

Acknowledging people with lived experience of cancer

It is through listening to those impacted by cancer that we gather the information necessary to move towards the cancer system NSW needs. Every person's story we hear, every experience shared, helps to develop our understanding of what's required to best meet the needs of people diagnosed with cancer, their loved ones and their health teams.

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Introduction

Vaping has become more common among young people. Many parents and carers feel unsure about how to talk about it.

Quick facts for parents and carers

This guide can help you have calm, simple conversations about vaping with young people in your life. They may be curious about vaping, have seen others vaping, be vaping themselves, or be choosing not to vape. You do not need to be an expert. Having clear, trusted information can help you feel more confident.



Chemicals in a vape

Vaping is not safe. Vapes contain nicotine and harmful chemicals.

- Nicotine is highly addictive and is found in most vapes.
- Regular use of nicotine often means people need more to get the same feeling from it. It can be hard to quit.
- The nicotine in a 6,000 'puff' vape can be the same as smoking 400 cigarettes.

Vapes have chemicals that can harm the body, including:

- Chemicals that can harm lungs, heart and other organs.
- Chemicals also found in poison and bug spray.
- Heavy metals like lead, nickel and chromium.

Vaping is not safe. It puts nicotine and toxic chemicals into the body.



Health effects of vaping

Vaping can cause harm now and may lead to more health problems later.

- Vaping puts harmful chemicals into lungs and can cause breathing problems.

- Nicotine can harm the growing brain, affecting learning, focus, memory and mood.
- Some young people who vape are more likely to start smoking.
- Some young people have needed hospital care because of vaping.
- The long-term harms of vaping are still being studied.
- Studies show vaping may increase the risk of lung and mouth cancers.



The law in Australia

The laws about vapes aim to protect young people from the harms of vaping and nicotine addiction:

- Vapes can only legally be sold in pharmacies.
- Vapes should only be sold to help people quit smoking or to manage nicotine dependence.
- People under 18 need a prescription to buy vapes from a pharmacy.
- Shops such as tobacconists, service stations and convenience stores are banned from selling vapes.
- People who have a vape for their own use are not targeted by the laws.
- Vaping is banned in places where smoking is banned.



1. Purpose of this guide

This guide will support parents to have safe, supportive and respectful conversations with young people about vaping.

The focus is to:

- Help parents, carers and young people to talk calmly about vaping.
- Stop young people from starting to vape.
- Support young people who want to stop vaping.

This guide is not about blaming or punishing young people. Young people may be influenced by friends and what they see online.



2. How to use this guide

This resource offers ideas about how and when to talk to young people about vaping. Every family is different, and you know your young person best.

- You do not need to read this guide all at once.
- Talks can happen over time.
- Use the parts that fit your family and culture.
- It's okay if it does not feel easy.
- The aim is to keep talks open and supportive.

Some families find it easy to talk about these things. Some find it hard. Both are ok.

You can:

- Use jokes if that feels right for your family.
- Share real stories from your family or community.
- Keep talks short.
- Talk a little at a time.

The main aim of this guide is to make a safe and caring place to talk, even if it feels hard.

3. Tips for talking with young people

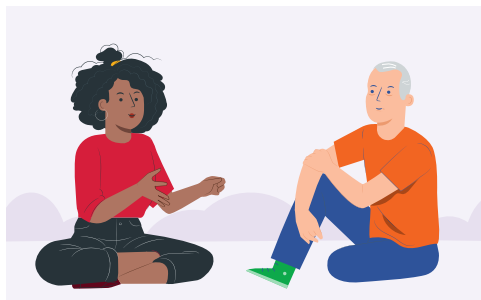
When you talk about vaping, it helps to:

- Stay calm and do not judge.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Ask questions first, and give advice later.
- Accept their feelings.

Young people are more likely to listen when they feel respected and heard.

Try to show you care, even if you do not fully agree. You could say: "Your feelings matter, and I want to understand."





4. Starting the conversation

Before you start talking about vaping, think about when and where. If you rush or make them feel judged, they may shut down.

Good times to talk:

- When you are side-by-side instead of sitting opposite each other, e.g. during everyday activities (such as, driving, cooking, walking).
- When vaping comes up on TV or online.
- When your young person starts to talk about it.

- “Have you seen or heard much about vapes?”
- “Has vaping come up for you?”

Keep your voice calm. Be curious, not angry. You could say: “I care about your health. I’m worried about some of the things I’ve heard about vaping”.

You can start by saying:

- “I see vaping a lot now. What do you think about it?”
- “Do kids your age talk about it at school?”



5. Why young people might try vaping

Young people may try vaping (or shisha or other nicotine products) because of:

- Curiosity or wanting to experiment.
- Peer pressure or wanting to fit in with others.
- Flavours and smells – sweet or fruity flavours can make them seem harmless.
- Stress or strong emotions – some people think vaping helps them cope.
- Seeing vaping on social media makes it look normal.

Vaping does not mean a young person is “bad”. Knowing their reasons can help you support them.

Young people may see vaping or shisha at parties or when spending time with friends. When others do it, vaping can seem normal. Even if it only happens sometimes, it can still harm health and lead to addiction.

6. If your young person is not vaping

If your young person is not vaping, it is still important to talk and stay connected.

You can:

- Support their choice not to vape.
- Ask if they see vaping at school or online.
- Talk about how to handle peer pressure.
- Tell them they can talk to you anytime.

You could say:

- “I’m glad that you are not vaping. How do you feel when others do it?”
- “What would you do if someone offered you a vape?”

You might like to talk about how to say no to vaping:

- “No thanks, I don’t vape”.
- “I’m trying to stay healthy”.
- “I’ve got sport later”.

They can also walk away, change the subject, or spend time with friends who do not vape.

These conversations can help young people feel strong and prepared, and confident in their decision to not vape.



7. About nicotine and addiction

When you vape, nicotine unlocks a 'feel-good' chemical in the brain called dopamine. It's what makes nicotine addictive, because the brain tells you to keep vaping to trigger the good feeling again.

The more a person vapes (or uses any nicotine product), the more their brain and body rely on nicotine, making it harder to quit. Needing to keep vaping exposes a person to the harmful effects of the other chemicals in vapes.

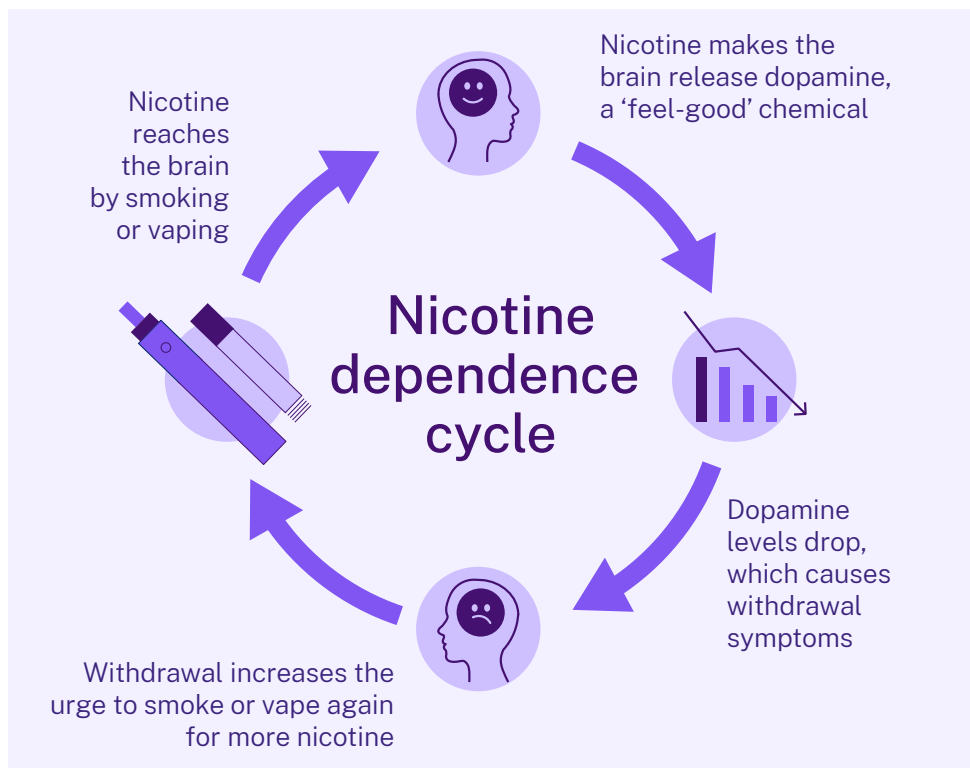
Regular use of vapes by adolescents and young adults can change the way their brain grows. Nicotine can affect learning, mood and emotions, and memory.

When young people are addicted to nicotine, they may feel strong urges to vape. This can make it hard to stop or go without vaping. Knowing the signs of nicotine addiction can help you support them.

Signs that someone may be addicted to nicotine include:

- Feeling angry or worried when they can't vape.
- Wanting to vape as soon as they wake up.
- Wanting to stop but not feeling able to.
- Trouble with focus and memory.





8. Nicotine and withdrawal

Withdrawal symptoms can happen when the body does not get the nicotine it is used to. This can happen when someone stops vaping, or anytime they cannot vape, like at school or on a long car trip.

Signs of withdrawal:

- Feeling stressed, or worried.
- Feeling tired or not sleeping well.
- Finding it hard to focus.
- Feeling restless or anxious.

The good news is this gets better. Most of these signs ease after 1-2 weeks. Knowing this can help your young person

get through it. Cravings to vape might last longer as the brain is learning to cope without nicotine.

If you smoke or vape

Being honest can help your young person. It shows them that you know how hard quitting can be, and that you are making healthy choices too. Be kind to yourself. Change takes time and getting help for your own health can support your young person too.

9. If your young person is vaping

If you find out your young person is vaping, it is normal to feel worried or upset. How you react in this moment matters a lot.

- Try to stay calm.
- Thank them for being honest.
- Focus on their health and wellbeing, not punishment.

You can ask:

- “What do you like about vaping?”
- “Have you thought about stopping or vaping less?”
- “Do you want help with this?”

Listen without judging. You may learn why they vape.

Other reasons people may vape, and how to respond:

Vaping to deal with stress

Some young people vape because they think it helps them manage stress. You can help by exploring healthier ways to cope with stress that don't involve nicotine, such as physical activity, creative outlets, or talking things through.

Vaping to fit in

Many young people feel pressure to vape because their friends do. Talk about what they think they would miss if they didn't vape and remind them that friendships are about more than vaping.

Vaping out of curiosity

It's normal for young people to want to experiment. You can acknowledge their curiosity while also explaining that nicotine in vapes is highly addictive, and that experimenting can quickly turn into vaping more than they planned.

Vaping because it's everywhere

Vaping can seem very common — especially through social media. Let them know that around 80% of young people in NSW don't vape, and that most choose not to because it's not harmless.

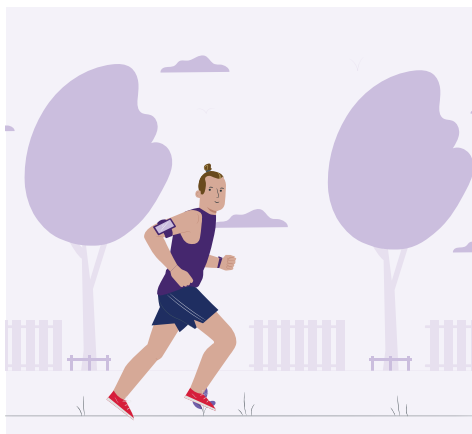
Supporting healthier ways to feel good or have fun

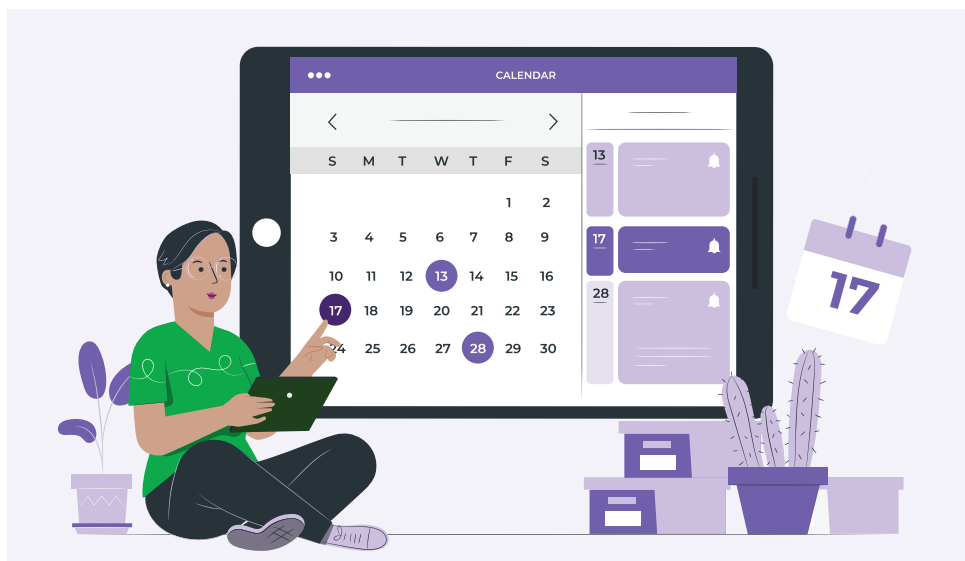
Helping your young person find other ways to relax or enjoy themselves can make a difference. Doing things together can help, such as:

- Being active – walking or sports.
- Listening to music or drawing.
- Talking to someone they trust.

If you smoke or vape yourself

It's okay to talk about your own habits. You can say you're trying to stop too. This shows stopping is hard but possible. It helps your young person feel understood.





10. Supporting a young person to quit vaping

Quitting vaping can be hard if nicotine addiction is involved.

You can help by:

- Encouraging small steps.
- Helping them recognise triggers, and deal with cravings.
- Not judging them.
- Celebrating progress, even if it is small.

If your young person is not ready to quit or does not want to quit:

- Let them know you are there for support when they are ready.
- Keep the conversation open and relaxed.
- Keep the focus on their health.
- Talk about ways to reduce harm, like not vaping around others.

Change takes time and relapse can happen. This does not mean failure. Your ongoing support and trust can help young people feel ready to quit in the future.

Dealing with your own emotions

- It is normal to feel surprised or stressed if you learn your young person is vaping. Try to manage your feelings away from them.
- Strong reactions can make them shut down or pull away. Staying calm helps keep them talking and open to support.
- If you smoke or vape, getting support can help both you and your young person.

11. Where to get help and support

If you want more help or personalised advice, support is available for young people and families. This includes help from doctors, nurses, other health professionals and community health services.

Quit support services:

Pave app

Pave is a free app created by Cancer Institute NSW to help young people stop vaping. The app helps with:

- Understanding and managing cravings.
- Feeling strong and motivated.
- Staying on track.

Young people can use the app on their own. They can also use it with other help.

Download Pave from the Apple App Store or Google Play.

 Download Pave

iCanQuit

iCanQuit is a website that helps people stop smoking or vaping. It gives tools that you can choose to suit you. The website helps:

- Make a quit plan.
- Stay motivated.
- Track your progress.
- Beat cravings.

You can use iCanQuit on your own or with other support.

 [iCanQuit.com.au](https://icanquit.com.au)

Quitline

Quitline (13 78 48) is free and can help:

- Parents and carers.
- People who smoke and vape.

You can talk to a trained worker. They listen and do not judge, and can help you:

- Talk with your young person.
- Handle hard talks.
- Know what to say if they vape.

Help is private. Interpreters are available.

 Call 13 7848

Shisha No Thanks

Shisha No Thanks is a website that helps adults learn about shisha (waterpipe) smoking. The website helps to:

- Explain health harms.
- Clear up myths.
- Support talks with young people about shisha.

 [ShishaNoThanks.org.au](https://shishanotanks.org.au)

NSW Health Vaping Toolkit

The Vaping Toolkit has trusted information to help parents, carers, teachers and health staff talk to young people about vaping.

There are resources in different languages for parents and carers.

 health.nsw.gov.au/vaping

12. Keep the conversation going

- One conversation is usually not enough.
 - Check in regularly.
 - Keep listening and offering support.
- Ongoing, respectful conversations help young people feel supported and decrease harm.
-

13. Key messages for parents and carers

This guide offers ideas and support, not a single 'right' way to have these conversations.

- You do not need to know everything about vaping.
- Your relationship with your young person matters most.
- Open, calm conversations make a real difference.
- Listen more than you talk, stay calm and be supportive.
- If you smoke or vape, help is there for you too.



