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Start Talking!

Building a Drug-Free Future

Know! E-Cigs, Vape Pens, and Throat Hits - Oh My!

You have more than likely talked countless times with your child about the dangers of smoking cigarettes, and the importance of steering clear of them – and that’s great because teens seem to be getting it. But while teen smoking has steadily declined, teen vaping has become all the rage.

The question now is whether or not you’re having conversations on the topic of “vaping” when you talk to your children about substances? Do you even know what vaping is exactly? If you answered “no” to one or both questions, you’re not alone. “Vaping” through the use of electronic cigarettes, vape pens, etc., is new territory for many of us parents, but without exception, it’s a topic we need to learn more about and a conversation we must have with our sons and daughters.

So let’s start with the basics. Vaping is the act of inhaling vapor into the lungs. While the internet provides an endless selection of portable vaporizers in terms of shape, size, features and power, the electronic cigarette (e-cig) and vape pen are two of the most common vaping devices used among youth. E-cigs and vape pens alike contain a battery-operated heating element that converts a liquid mixture, often called e-liquid or e-juice, into an inhalable, fog-like mist. The sensation one feels when taking a puff on their device is called a throat hit, which can be weak or strong, depending on what’s in the juice.

So what exactly is in the juice? It’s hard to say precisely, since e-cig manufacturers are not required to report their ingredients. Typically however, the liquid is a base mixture of propylene glycol or vegetable glycerin, which are considered GRAS (Generally Recognized As Safe) by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Most e-juice also contains flavoring, of which there are hundreds to choose from, including cotton candy, bubble gum, candy corn and many more that would entice most young people.

Among those teens who vape, the majority report vaping the flavoring only, however, 13% of eighth graders and 22% of high school seniors say they add nicotine to the mix, 6% to 7% of eighth, tenth and twelfth graders say they vape marijuana or hash oil, and some youth simply report having no idea what they’re vaping.

When it comes to vaping nicotine, marijuana, or having no clue what's in the juice, the negatives are pretty obvious, and the conversation of non-use is clear. But how do you respond when your teen says, "It's just flavoring, not nicotine, not marijuana. It's safe."

Good question, here's why. Some experts say the heating element in these devices can transform these "safe" solvents, flavoring agents and various vape oil additives into carcinogens and other dangerous toxins that wreak havoc on the lungs. However, the challenge is that there are no conclusive studies proving the dangers. But at the same time, there are no conclusive studies showing vaping of any kind to be safe either. And that's what makes it dangerous! It is the unknowns.

California-based ***Teen Therapy Center*** said it best in their blog regarding the dangers of the unknowns:

- The fact is, there have not been sufficient scientific studies done on vaping devices.
- Vaping devices are relatively new to the market and kids are crazy to get their hands on them.
- We don't know the long term health risks. This makes every teenager with a vape pen a lab rat!

What we do know, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention is that: *"Potentially harmful constituents... have been documented in some e-cigarette cartridges, including irritants, genotoxins, and animal carcinogens."*

When cigarette smoking became all the rage among teens so many years ago, the risks were not clearly known. The same may hold true for vaping. The most important thing we can convey to our children is that breathing anything but fresh, clean air into their lungs is a potential hazard to their health both in the present and in the future, and it's simply not worth the risk.

Sources: [The American Physiological Society: E-Cigarette Vapor - Even when Nicotine-Free - Found to Damage Lung Cells, May 2015](#). [Jahan Marcu, Ph.D., How Safe is Your Vape Pen? - The Hidden Dangers of Propylene Glycol, July 2015](#). [National Institute on Drug Abuse: Teens and E-cigarettes](#). [Kent Toussaint, Teen Therapy Center: Are Vape Pens Dangerous? August 2014](#).

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