



How to Break Through Barriers

It can be difficult to get past a flat-out denial of drug or alcohol use from your teen. Some kids can't bear to take responsibility for their behavior and want to look good at all costs.

Here are some ways to get past roadblocks:

1. Be firm and loving.
2. Don't yell. Remain calm. It's harder to fight with – or storm off from – a calm person than it is from somebody who is yelling at you.
3. Insist that your teen acknowledges and understands the value of truth telling. Tell her that people trust you more when you are honest; that honesty is a highly-respected trait that requires courage and independent thought; and usually liars get caught in their lies.
4. Think beforehand of how you could verify her claims and bring them up – for example, if your teen says she spent the day at a friend's house, tell her you may need to call her friend's mom to check on the story.
5. If you have objective proof that your teen is lying, bring it up – but try not to make it a triumph or contest. It's not about winning the argument or proving your teen lied to you, it's about keeping your child safe.
6. Focus on the behavior and why it worries you. Don't make it sound like you think your teen is a bad person because he has tried drugs or alcohol.
7. If your teen flips the conversation to make it sound like you don't trust her, reply that that drug and alcohol use is serious and you're concerned for her health and safety and that you're willing to have some tough conversations with her to make sure she's safe.
8. Instead of going straight to reprimanding your teen for lying, try to find out more about why he lied in the first place. Keep talking and let your teen know that you will get to the truth no matter how many conversations it takes and that you will do everything available to keep him/her safe and away from drugs.
9. Whether your teen is lying about his drug use, where he was, or whom he was with, set clear consequences so he knows what will happen if he repeats this behavior in the future.
10. Consider granting immunity. Some young people get caught in a web of lies and can't get out. You can sometimes help by offering a chance to clear the record. Tell her that if she tells the truth there will be no immediate consequences but she'll have to conduct herself differently in the future. And if she doesn't, she'll be held accountable.
11. Reward honesty in the future. If your teen opens up to you and tells you the truth about something that perhaps isn't so easy for him – be sure to tell him that you're proud of him for doing so.