

ADULT ISSUES

ParentLink guides use 'he' and 'she' in turn. Change to suit your child's sex.



ACT
Government

Community Services

Smoking is harmful to our health. People who smoke have a higher risk of heart and lung disease, and various cancers. We also now know that second-hand smoke (passive smoking) is harmful. Governments, councils, schools and health services are aware of this and have taken steps to make more public spaces smoke-free.

Parents can protect their children from the harmful effects of passive smoking and guide them away from taking up smoking when they are older. The best way to do this is to be a healthy role model and to quit if you smoke. It's also important to protect children from second-hand smoke and to give them a smoke-free home and car.

Why people smoke cigarettes

People smoke cigarettes to satisfy their craving for nicotine.

The longer a person smokes, and the more they smoke, the harder it is to quit. Often people try quitting many times before they succeed.

Some people develop habits that make them feel they need to smoke, such as when talking on the phone, having their morning coffee, an alcoholic drink or when out with friends. The urge to smoke can also be triggered by feelings such as anger, stress, boredom, excitement and anxiety.

Although nicotine addiction keeps people smoking, young people usually start smoking because of the social image they want to present to others. They may think that smoking:

- makes them look tough, cool, sexy, more grown-up and attractive.
- can help them make friends or fit in with their peers.

Young people are more likely to start smoking if their friends or family smoke. Most young people who smoke regularly continue to smoke as adults.

Pregnancy and smoking

It's recommended that you do not smoke during pregnancy. Smoking during pregnancy means there is more chance of having a:

- low birth weight baby—small babies are often less able to cope with the stress of labour and delivery
- miscarriage
- baby born early (premature)
- still birth (born dead).

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Smoking during pregnancy and after the birth of a baby by either parent increases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

To give your baby a healthy start in life:

- quit smoking if you or your partner are pregnant or planning to become pregnant
- insist that friends and family do not smoke near your baby
- make your home and car smoke-free.

Second-hand smoke and passive smoking

Second-hand smoke is the smoke that comes off the end of a lit cigarette and the smoke that a smoker breathes out. It's also known as environmental tobacco smoke.

Breathing in this smoke is called passive smoking. Passive smoking is harmful, especially to young children and babies.

There is no safe level of smoking or second-hand smoke. Smoking in another room or by an open window is not enough to prevent children from being exposed to second-hand smoke.

Effects of passive smoking on children and babies

Children with a parent who smokes are more at risk of illnesses. Smoke irritates eyes and airways, and increases the risk of illnesses in children such as:

- pneumonia
- middle ear infections
- bronchitis
- more serious asthma attacks
- coughing and wheezing

THIS GUIDE AND OTHERS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE

Other dangers for children

Apart from the dangers of passive smoking there are other risks to children who are around people who smoke.

- Cigarettes and ash are poisonous. Eating even one butt can make a young child sick. Keep cigarettes and ashtrays away from children.
- Cigarettes can seriously burn children.
- Matches and lighters can cause burns and can start house and other fires. Keep them away from children.
- Smoking while driving increases the chance of having an accident.

What you can do

Be a healthy role model

Parents are the most powerful role models for their children. Even though you may tell your children not to smoke, they are more likely to copy you, than to do what you say. Children with a parent who smokes are twice as likely to take up smoking themselves in adolescence. The best action you can take is to quit smoking. Contact your doctor or Quitline for support.

- Talk with your children about the dangers of smoking, listen to what they say and be clear about your views.
- Support smoking prevention programs and 'no-smoking' policies in schools or other places.
- Keep ashtrays, cigarette packs, matches and lighters away from children.

Have a smoke-free home and car

- Make your home smoke-free—display *no-smoking* stickers.
- Do not allow anyone to smoke in the car.
- Ask your family and friends not to smoke, or to smoke outside and dispose of butts carefully. Sometimes they may refuse to do this. Explain your reasons, and ask them to respect your decision.
- If you or others must smoke do it outside well away from children.

What if my child smokes?

Most parents don't want their children to smoke, even if they smoke themselves.

For parents who don't smoke, or who have quit, it can be upsetting to find out their child smokes.

Many young people will experiment with smoking (and other things) to challenge their parents' rules in their need to be independent. This 'testing out' in adolescence can create pressures within a family. For some young people, being told not to do something can trigger them to do the very thing parents advise against.

About 80% of young people who smoke regularly continue to smoke as adults. It helps to:

- be clear about your reasons for not wanting your child to smoke
- give balanced information from an outside source about the benefits of not smoking
- focus on the short term effects for example, the smell, losing fitness, the effects on skin, hair and teeth, and the cost
- help your child to find activities where they feel good about themselves and where they can achieve some independence, for example, sport, music, movies, bike riding or bush walking
- support your child to quit. Recognise how hard it is and that it may take more than one try.

What the law says in ACT

- Young people under 18 years cannot buy any smoking products, including cigarettes and cigars.
- It is an offence for anyone to sell smoking products to a person under 18 years.
- It is an offence to buy smoking products on behalf of (for) someone under 18.
- It is an offence to use another person's ID or to use forged ID to obtain smoking products.

Reminders

- Smoking is harmful to health. Passive smoking is harmful to children and babies.
- It's best not to smoke during pregnancy.
- There is no safe level of smoking or second-hand smoke.
- Children learn from their parents and copy what they see—be a healthy role model. Children are more likely to smoke later in life if their parents smoke.
- Give your children a smoke-free home and car.
- If you're ready to quit there is help—call the Quitline 13 7848.

Contacts

Cancer Council	Free and confidential information about all aspects of cancer	9am–5pm Monday–Friday	131 120
Quitline		24-hour	137 848

Websites

www.actcancer.org	Cancer Council ACT
www.cyh.com	Parenting and child health information
www.oxygen.org.au	Oxygen
www.parentlink.act.gov.au	Other parenting guides

This guide's content has been produced by Parenting SA and adapted by the ACT Government to reflect the application to laws of the Australian Capital Territory.

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