

## Helping you start the

## conversation about vaping

Talking to your child about vaping can feel difficult, especially if you are not sure how to begin. You might worry about saying the wrong thing or not having all the answers, but that is completely normal.

These conversation starters are designed to help you get the chat started. They give you simple questions to ask, along with guidance to support how you respond.

- 1 What have you heard about vaping from friends, school or online?
- 2 Do you know if vaping is legal for children?
- 3 Do you think vaping seems normal because people see it around them so much?
- 4 Why do you think vapes come in bright colours, sweet smells and flavours like fruit or sweets?
- 5 How do you think social media, influencers or videos can affect what young people think about vaping?
- 6 Do you think most people your age are actually vaping?
- 7 What would you say if someone told you vaping is 'not a big deal'?
- 8 What do you think is really inside a vape?
- 9 Why do you think nicotine is a concern for you?
- 10 What do you think the risks might be if someone says they'll 'only try it once'?
- 11 Why is it different for adults to use vapes to stop smoking, but not okay for children to vape?
- 12 What would you say if someone told you, 'It's only flavoured steam'?
- 13 Why do you think adults are worried about illegal or unregulated vapes?
- 14 How do you think children get hold of vapes if shops are not allowed to sell them to under-18s?
- 15 What kinds of situations might make someone feel pressured to try vaping?
- 16 What could you say if someone offered you a vape and said, 'Just try it'?
- 17 What could you do if an older child or a group of friends were pressuring you to vape?
- 18 What would help you feel confident enough to make your own choice, even if others are vaping?
- 19 How could you leave a situation if vaping was happening and you felt uncomfortable?
- 20 Who could you talk to if you felt pressured, worried or unsure about vaping?
- 21 What would you do if you were worried about losing friends by saying no to vaping?

## **1 What have you heard about vaping from friends, school or online?**

Asking your child what they have seen online or heard from friends about vaping is a good place to start. Children pick up ideas from online videos, social media, and friends. Asking what they have seen or heard helps you understand what is shaping their views. It also stops you from making wrong guesses.

You may learn where the pressure is coming from. They might not say 'I'm being pressured', but may talk about influencers, older pupils, friends, flavours, or the idea that 'everyone does it'. When you know what they are hearing, you can give the right advice and help them make sense of it. Ask simple questions, listen well, and keep the talk open so your child feels safe to share more.

## **2 Do you know if vaping is legal for children?**

In the UK, it is illegal to sell nicotine vapes to under 18s. It is also illegal for adults to buy them for anyone under 18. This is important for parents to know. A child may see vapes in shops or hear people talk about them and think they are allowed. They are not.

The law focuses on who supplies the vape. A child who vapes needs support. But adults who sell or buy vapes for children are breaking the law. It is important to think about where the vape came from and who may have helped the child get it.

Disposable vapes were also banned in June 2025, and these were the most popular products among young people who vape. Talk with your child about the law, so they understand what is allowed and feel safe to come to you.

## **3 Do you think vaping seems normal because people see it around them so much?**

Children often decide what is 'normal' by what they see a lot. If they see vaping with friends, in public places, online or among older children, it can start to feel like a normal part of growing up. Children can also get the wrong idea about how many people vape. A child may think 'everyone is doing it' because they see it or hear about it a lot. But seeing something often does not mean most people are doing it. Helping your child question what they see can help them see that vaping is not as common as it may seem. Talk with your child about what is really normal, so they feel confident to make safe choices.

## **4 Why do you think vapes come in bright colours, sweet smells and flavours like fruit or sweets?**

Sweet flavours, bright packaging and nice smells can make a vape seem fun or harmless. This can make it look safe, even when it is not. This can be even stronger for younger children, who are often drawn to things that look or smell appealing.

For parents, the concern is not just about attention. These features can also make vaping seem mild or safe. A child may think, 'If it smells like sweets and comes in bright colours, how dangerous can it be?' This is why it is important to explain the difference between how a vape looks and what it does inside the body. Talk with your child about the facts, so they can see past the look and make safer choices.

## **5 How do you think social media, influencers or videos can affect what young people think about vaping?**

Social media can have a strong effect on how children see vaping. A child may see vaping in videos, posts or trends. They may also see influencers using it. This can make vaping seem normal, popular or even expected. Some online content can share wrong ideas. These include that vaping helps with stress, is harmless, or that 'everyone' tries it.

This can be hard for parents because the influence often happens in the background. A child may not realise they are being influenced. By the time they are offered a vape, it may already feel familiar. They may be less cautious when it happens in real life. This is why it helps to talk about what your child is seeing online, not just what they are doing in person.

Ask your child about what they see online and talk it through together, so they feel confident to question it and make safe choices.

## **6 Do you think most people your age are actually vaping?**

Young people may feel that most children are vaping now, but that is not true. They may hear stories about it or see it online. When something is talked about a lot, it can seem like 'everyone is doing it'. But in fact, four in five children aged 11 to 17 have never tried vaping.

However, youth vaping is still a real concern and is growing in some places. In Essex, one in 10 young people (11 to 18) are regular vapers, vaping more than once a week. Data also shows that some children start younger than many parents expect. 1% of children are already vaping by age 11, and use rises steadily through early secondary school. This means it is important to take it seriously, while also helping children understand that not everyone is vaping. Talk with your child about what they think is 'normal', so they can feel confident making their own safe choices.

## **7 What would you say if someone told you vaping is 'not a big deal'?**

Children can get mixed messages about vaping. They may hear that it is less harmful than smoking. They may see adults using it. They may notice bright colours, sweet smells and flavours. They may also see friends or people online using it without concern. All of this can make vaping seem low risk, especially if they are not given clear and simple facts about nicotine and how it affects a growing brain. If a product is seen in shops, online or among friends, it can start to seem normal and widely accepted. A child may not be ignoring the risks on purpose. They may simply start to think vaping is common and not something to worry about.

Talk with your child about what they are seeing and hearing, so they can understand the risks and make informed choices.

## **8 What do you think is really inside a vape?**

A vape usually works by heating a liquid. This liquid contains nicotine, flavourings and other chemicals. The device turns the liquid into a mist that is breathed in. Some vaping liquids also include substances such as propylene glycol and vegetable glycerine. One of the key things for parents to know is that this is not 'just flavoured steam'. Children who vape are breathing in more than a harmless mist, even if the smell is sweet or the packaging looks fun.

There are also worries about what these substances can do inside a young person's lungs and body. Chemicals that can harm the lungs are released into the body. Some vapes may also contain illegal drugs, such as cannabis, Spice (synthetic Cannaboids) or THC. More than one in six vapes taken from schools tested positive for the illegal drug spice. More than two in five vapes sold as cannabis were also found to contain the illegal drug spice. Children may not know what is in the vape they are using and some products may be illegal or unsafe. Because of this, any vape a child has access to should be treated as unsafe. Make sure your child understands that some vapes can contain harmful substances without them knowing.

## **9 Why do you think nicotine is a concern for you?**

Nicotine is a major concern because it is highly addictive. It is the same ingredient that makes cigarettes addictive. Young people's brains can be more sensitive to it because they are still developing. It can affect attention, self-control, learning and focus. It may increase anxiety and stress. It can also cause headaches and mouth and throat irritation, sickness, and dizziness from high levels.

For parents, the challenge is that nicotine can start to change behaviour early on. A child may not fully understand what is happening. They may start to crave it and feel irritable without it. They may think about it a lot. They may keep using it even when they want to stop. Over time, it can stop being about curiosity or fitting in and it can start to feel like something they need. Encourage your child to talk openly, so they feel safe coming to you before vaping becomes a habit.

## **10 What do you think the risks might be if someone says they'll 'only try it once'?**

If your child says that they would only ever try vaping once, you can say that many young people think that at first. But vaping products are designed to be appealing and may contain nicotine. One try can lead to another, especially with peer pressure or sense that it is normal. Even if it does not become a habit straight away, it can make the next time feel easier.

You can also explain that the risk is not just about addiction. Even one try means breathing in chemicals. It may also mean sharing vapes or being in a situation that is harder to leave. What starts as 'just once' can quickly feel different in the moment. Talk it through without judgement, and remind your child they can always come to you before they make a choice.

### **11 Why is it different for adults to use vapes to stop smoking, but not okay for children to vape?**

If your child wonders why adults can use vapes, but young people can't, you can explain that some adults use vapes to try to stop smoking. That does not mean they are safe for children. Adults who already smoke may be trying to cut down harm. But a child who does not smoke is taking on new risks. Vapes can still have nicotine and other chemicals. A young person's body and brain are still growing, so these can affect them more.

You can also say the law shows this difference. Vapes with nicotine should not be sold to under-18s. Adults should not buy them for children. This is because young people can get hooked more easily. It can affect focus, mood, and sleep. Keep it clear and calm, and remind your child they can always ask you anything and talk it through.

### **12 What would you say if someone told you, 'It's only flavoured steam'?**

A vape is not just harmless flavoured steam. Vapes heat a liquid into a mist that is breathed in. This liquid often contains nicotine, flavourings, and other chemicals. Some of these can still harm the lungs. The sweet smell can make it seem safe, but that can be misleading.

You can also say that flavour is part of what makes vaping seem fun, but it does not make it safe. Something can smell nice and still harm the body. It can affect breathing, sleep, focus, and mood. If your child links flavour with safety, this is a good time to gently correct that idea. Ask what they think and what they have heard, and let them know they can always come to you to talk things through.

### **13 Why do you think adults are worried about illegal or unregulated vapes?**

If a child gets an illegal or unsafe vape, the risks can be higher. It may not be clear what is inside it. It may be stronger than expected. It may not meet safety rules. Some vapes may also contain illegal drugs. More than one in six vapes taken from schools tested positive for spice. More than two in five vapes sold as cannabis were also found to contain the illegal drug spice. This means the risk can be more than just nicotine.

It is also important to think about how the vape was obtained. If it did not come from a legal shop, it may involve older children or adults breaking the rules. This can put a child in unsafe situations, as well as expose them to unsafe products. Make sure your child knows they can talk to you, so you can help them stay safe.

#### **14 How do you think children get hold of vapes if shops are not allowed to sell them to under-18s?**

Children may get access to vapes in different ways. Over three in four children were given their first vape by someone they know, mostly friends. This shows most come from other people. Over two in five young people who vape buy them from shops, which is illegal. One in four get them from informal sources. Some may try a vape in social settings where it is passed around. If vapes are easy to see and easy to get, they may seem easy to try.

Some adults may not fully understand the law or realise that buying vapes for children is illegal. They may think vaping is less serious than smoking. This can make it easier for children to get hold of vapes. For parents, it helps to think about access not just in shops, but through friends and social groups. Ask your child where they see vapes, so you can understand and help them stay safe.

#### **15 What kinds of situations might make someone feel pressured to try vaping?**

Over three in four children were given their first vape by someone, mostly friends. And the second most common reason for young people to start vaping is because 'Other people use them so I join in'. Children can face pressure in simple and quiet ways. Someone might say 'just try it'. They may be around friends who pass a vape around. An older pupil might be using one nearby. Your child may feel it is easier to join in than stand out. They may worry about looking different, childish or awkward. They may want to fit in and don't want to be left out.

Pressure can also build over time. Your child may see others vaping on the way to school. They may hear that a friend's sibling can buy vapes. They may notice sweet smells or see vapes online a lot. This can make it feel normal, even if it is not. Over half of 11 to 17-year-olds were aware of vaping promotion in shops. Nearly one in three were aware online via social media platforms. Talk about these moments early, and remind your child they can come to you if they are feeling uncomfortable.

#### **16 What could you say if someone offered you a vape and said, 'Just try it'?**

Let your child know they do not need a perfect answer. A short and clear reply is enough. If a friend says 'just try it.', they can say 'no thanks', 'I'm not into that', or 'I don't want to'. They do not need to explain more if they do not want to. Calm and firm words work better than an angry or unsure response.

If they feel better with a reason, help them find one that feels natural. It could be about not liking it or not wanting nicotine. It could be not wanting trouble. The key is that it feels real to them. The more it fits, the more likely they will use it. Build your child's confidence to say no, and to come to you if they feel pressured.

### **17 What could you do if an older child or a group of friends were pressuring you to vape?**

Pressure from older children can feel harder. Older pupils may seem more confident, more experienced or more powerful. Your child might worry about looking young or not fitting in. This can make even a simple offer feel more intense. They may feel they have to agree, even when they do not want to.

Talk about this openly with your child. Remind them they do not owe older children their agreement. It is okay to say no in a simple and polite way. You can also help them think of ways to leave the situation. They could move away, join another group, or find support from a trusted adult or friend. Build your child's confidence to say no, and to come to you if they feel pressured.

### **18 What would help you feel confident enough to make your own choice, even if others are vaping?**

Confidence grows when children understand their own choices. It helps to talk about health, nicotine, boundaries, and peer pressure in a simple way. This helps your child see why their choice matters. When they understand their reasons, they are more likely to stand by them. They feel stronger when they know their views are heard and respected.

It is also important to show that confidence does not mean being loud or bold. Sometimes it means staying calm and keeping things simple. Your child can say no, walk away, and speak to a trusted adult later. These are strong choices. Confidence comes from feeling prepared and supported. Remind your child they can always talk to you when they feel unsure or under pressure.

### **19 How could you leave a situation if vaping was happening and you felt uncomfortable?**

Your child may worry about how to leave a vaping situation. It helps to talk about ways to leave before it happens. Your child could walk away or find another friend. They could move to a different place or send a message to someone they trust. Knowing they can leave makes it easier to act when they feel unsure or awkward.

You can also let them know that leaving is a good choice and does not mean failure. They do not have to stay to prove anything. Getting out early is often the safest and strongest option. If they know they will not be in trouble by yourself, they are more likely to leave. Make sure they know they can always come to you after, and keep the door open for them to talk anytime.

## 20 Who could you talk to if you felt pressured, worried or unsure about vaping?

If you are worried and not sure what to do next, you do not have to deal with this on your own. There is support available. You can speak to a GP, a school nurse, or school staff who support pupils. They can help you understand what is going on and what support may help your child. You can also look for trusted advice for parents and young people. Think about what kind of help you need most. This could be advice, support with stopping, or help with stress or pressure. Once you know that, it is easier to take the next step.

**For more help and support online, you can access the NHS Better Health tools**

(<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/help-others-quit/young-people-and-vaping/>)

or **Talk to Frank** (<https://www.talktofrank.com/drug/vapes>).

**For support on quitting vaping, visit Childline** (<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/you-your-body/drugs-alcohol-smoking/vaping/>) or **Smokefree Teen** (<https://teen.smokefree.gov/quit-vaping>).

**Quit vaping support is available to children and young people in Essex aged 11 to 18:**

([www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/young-people/east/vaping-pilot](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/young-people/east/vaping-pilot)) Build confidence at home, so saying no to vaping feels easier outside.

## 21 What would you do if you were worried about losing friends by saying no to vaping?

Your child may be worried about losing friends if they say no to vaping. Many children want to fit in and feel part of a group. They may worry that saying no will make them seem different, immature or difficult. It helps to listen and take their feelings seriously. When they feel understood, they are more open to hearing your support.

You can also help them think about what a good friendship looks like. A true friend will not push them to do something they do not want to do. It is okay to set clear limits. Saying no may feel hard at first, but it can show who respects them. This can help them build better friendships over time. Let them know they can talk to you about their friendships and any worries they have.



There is no single perfect conversation about vaping. What matters is keeping the conversation going over time.

Your child may not say much at first, and that is okay. Even short chats can help them feel supported and more prepared to deal with pressure.

Let your child know they can talk to you at any time. That support can make a real difference to the choices they make.



**Find out more at: [ClearTheAir.org.uk](http://ClearTheAir.org.uk)**