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Should Parents Tell Children

No. They don't need a play-by-play of all the stupid things you did

BY DR. MICHELLE R. CALLAHAN

You have more to lose than gain by telling your children that you did drugs when you were young. I'm not saying don't ever tell them; I'm saying that you don't have to tell them until they become adults (or very close to it). If you feel compelled to discuss your drug history with your kids, ask yourself why you think you need to tell your children about your past indiscretions. After hearing your story, do you think they are more or less likely to do the same? Do you think they have more or less respect for you as a parent (from their vantage point as a child)? Whether or not to tell them is about what you honestly believe will have the greatest positive impact on them; it's not based on their right to ask and your sense of obligation to answer.



Dr. Michelle Callahan is a life coach and psychologist who has worked with clients for more than 10 years. She has appeared as a relationship expert on several national TV shows, including *Oprah*. Her new reality show *Queen Bees* will premiere in July.

Your children are not your friends or your confidants, they are your kids and all the dirt that you have ever done can be shared later in life when you feel confident that you know how they are going to process and interpret your confessions.

You are their role model, so sharing your experiences may give them the impression that they can and should follow in your footsteps (even when that clearly isn't your desire or intention). Before you share your experiences, your children need to reach the age where they can understand and properly digest that reality. When they are adults you can laugh and talk about the crazy things you did when you were

younger, or you may choose to take certain things with you to your grave.

You should not volunteer your drug-use history, but you don't have to lie if your children ask you directly about your experience with drugs. If they ask, take time to assess and measure their maturity level and ability to handle that information. If your kids are going to find out anyway, then yes, I think they should hear it from you, but in the middle of a conversation about why they shouldn't do drugs, don't feel that you need to use yourself as an example of what not to do. There are enough examples in their world of what not to do, so why add your name to the list? You don't owe your children a play-by-play of all the stupid things you did as a young

person, but if they are already aware of them, then you should definitely take the opportunity to explain your behavior and talk about the negative consequences of your decision. Teach them everything they need to know about the perils of drugs, but without you as the main character of the story.

Chances are that your children will hear your confession of your drug use, take one look at your success, and determine that doing drugs didn't slow you down one bit. You look good and you live well, so in their minds how did drugs hurt you? They may imagine that they can safely do drugs and just stop whenever they are ready. What if that was true for you, but isn't true for them? Sometimes kids see drug and alcohol abuse as a legacy, and they use their parents' drug and alcohol abuse as the explanation and excuse for their own. Given their youthful feelings of invincibility, they may not acknowledge the long-term effects of negative health behaviors like drug, alcohol or cigarette use, but as an adult, you do, so you have to protect them

“Keep the focus on your kids, instead of yourself.”

from those things they are too inexperienced to understand.

Keep the focus on your kids, instead of yourself. Talk to them about peer pressure, and all the various situations that they might find themselves in and then teach them all of the different ways that they can get out of those tough situations. Teach them what to say and how to say it so that they can sidestep the pressure to use drugs and keep their reputations among their friends intact. Insist that they use designated drivers and remind them that no matter what you will always pick them up anywhere anytime if they get in trouble. They need to hear that more than any story you can tell them about how much fun you and your friends had getting high as kids. If you want to tell them a personal story about drugs, then tell them about someone you know whose life was ruined by drug or alcohol abuse. Remind them of all the stories they've heard about overdoses and accidental suicides. That will personalize the situation for them and remind them of all that they have to lose when they use. □