

A Unique Way to Talk with Kids about Smoking

Anti-smoking messages target us every day. In addition, legislation has made smoking more expensive than ever, while new medications have made it easier than ever to quit. While all of these methods have decreased the number of existing smokers, our young people are still vulnerable to marketing and peer pressure. Parents and educators may want to explore a fresh way of delivering messages on this topic: the environmental impact of smoking.

Many young people are concerned about environmental issues, so much so that it has become one of the major youth movements in high schools and college campuses across the country. It's important to meet youth "where they are," and to deliver messages relevant to their interests.

Just how does cigarette smoking impact the environment? Since most smokers have been moved outside, so have their discarded butts. Additionally, many new cars do not come with an ashtray, therefore many butts are thrown out of car windows to the side of the road.

There are about 1.2 billion smokers in the world, with 44.5 million adult smokers in the U.S. It is estimated that around 22% of high school students smoke. About 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are disposed of every year around the world. Many of these end up on the ground. Cigarette filters are not made of cotton, but of synthetic fibers. These fibers take somewhere between 15 to 25 years to degrade. While these butts lie on or in the ground, they leech toxic chemicals into the soil, which eventually work their way into water sources, or potentially into the foods we grow. Additionally, animals, particularly fish, may swallow the filters with fatal consequences. Birds have been known to pick up discarded and weathered cigarette butts to use in their nests. The chemicals can damage their eggs and chicks.

Over 1,000 Americans die each year from tobacco related fires. Lit cigarettes thrown out of car windows or tossed onto the ground account for a notable number of forest, roadside and house fires.

Globally, over 600 million trees are destroyed each year and used for fire to dry tobacco leaves. Cigarette machines use up to 3.7 miles of paper per hour. Tobacco is a high maintenance crop which depletes the soil of nutrients. In addition, during the three month growing period, an astounding amount of pesticides, fertilizers and weed killers are used to maintain the crop. These chemicals also leech into the soil and affect water supplies.

What can young people do? Simply talking about the environmental impact of smoking may be enough. Encourage businesses to install receptacles for cigarette butts. Ask people to dispose of their cigarette butts appropriately. For young people who are considering smoking, encourage them to think about the toll on the planet as well as their

health. It's much easier to quit when you first start smoking than if you have had the habit for years. It's not easy to do, but over the counter stop smoking aids and prescription medications have made it easier than ever before. New York State offers a wonderful service to anyone who wants to quit smoking, regardless of income or age. It's called the New York State Smokers Quitline. You simply need to give them a call and they will not only send you free nicotine replacement aids, but also offer counseling. They can be reached toll free at 1-866-NYQUITS (1-866-697-8487.) You can learn more at their website www.nysmokefree.com.

The Great American Smoke-out will be held on November 20th. In addition to encouraging smokers to make a plan to quit, the Great American Smoke-out is a day for Americans to join the American Cancer Society and its sister advocacy organization, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action NetworkSM (ACS CAN) in their efforts to advocate for smoke-free laws in communities nationwide. The combination of smoke-free communities and smoking cessation support is critical to helping smokers quit and stay tobacco-free.

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REACH CNY (formerly the Family Ties Network, Inc.,) works to ensure access and support for the full range of quality, culturally-sensitive health and human services; to reduce teen pregnancies; and promote the health and well-being of individuals and families; through education and advocacy.