

## 6A's for Talking to Kids about Tobacco Use

The 6A's represent a set of guidelines to use when communicating with youth about tobacco use, as well as addressing other difficult situations that may arise. These guidelines will assist parents in creating an open dialogue with children to communicate their opinions, knowledge, or experiences regarding tobacco use, which would then assist youth in making healthy choices. By purposefully using these guidelines to communicate in a non-judgmental way with your children about the issues that they face, the 6A's will facilitate your ability to teach life's lessons.

By **ANTICIPATING** the child's experiences both inside and outside of sport, this will enable you to **ASK** good questions about potential health issues they may face, particularly regarding tobacco use. This will provide an opportunity to offer **ADVICE** on topics related to tobacco use. You will also be able to **ASSESS** his/her risk status for tobacco use, and then you can **ASSIST** him/her in developing an addiction free healthy lifestyle. It is important to remember, however, that as a parent the most important A is **ACTION** – your commitment to teach, enforce, advocate and model appropriate behaviors.

### ANTICIPATE (Have a silent dialogue with yourself)

The following are some of the issues your child will face or may currently be facing regarding to tobacco use:

- Tobacco use is a behavior that children encounter everyday.
  - Be aware of trends with tobacco use that your child may be exposed to. The newest fad is the “hooka bar.” A hooka is a large pipe that produces flavored tobacco.
- Spitting and chewing behaviors are commonly seen in sports, particularly baseball. Whether it is spitting tobacco, sunflower seeds, or chewing bubble gum, children will mimic this behavior
- Some gum manufacturers, *who are owned by the tobacco companies*, use both tin cans and pouches for packaging to mimic the major leagues. This is the same approach that was previously used with candy cigarettes to target children to use their tobacco products.
- Be aware of the influential people in young athletes' lives such as professional athletes, other famous figures (i.e. movie stars), coaches, parents, older siblings and older peers. These individuals serve as role models and children often copy their behaviors.
  - There has recently been a resurgence of smoking and chewing tobacco use featured in mainstream movies.



## **ASK**

Ask leading or open-ended questions that require more than a simple “yes” or “no” response, such as:

- “When was the last time you saw an athlete using tobacco?”
- “Wouldn’t it be disgusting to have to stretch or sit on the ground when you know that people have been spitting there?”
- “Do you know what cigarettes have in them?”
- “Why do you think someone would start using tobacco? Do you know what tobacco can do to you?”

## **ADVICE**

Following the assessment phase, you can provide advice to the child on how to lead a tobacco-free lifestyle. Your child may begin to wonder about your personal experiences with tobacco and begin to ask specific questions. Try to be honest with them if they ask you questions about your own experiences or opinions.

- Develop an understanding of tobacco as a substance. Most importantly, you should strive to provide advice that helps the child understand that tobacco is bad for you and that it is addictive, which means that it is very difficult to give up.
- Use real life examples that a child would recognize as an example to help the child make connections between tobacco use and negative consequences. For example, “Did you know that the baseball player over there can’t give up tobacco?”
- Talk about the consequences of using tobacco. Just saying “Tobacco is bad for you” isn’t enough. Give children facts, such as:
  - Nicotine contains 43 chemicals, it is a poisonous drug, and it can kill people.
  - Smoking causes heart disease, lung disease, cancers, and strokes.
  - Smoking can lead to rotten and yellow teeth, smelly hair, or stinky breath.
- Kids may say things like “If it’s so bad, why does Grandma smoke?” or “Why did you smoke?”
  - Try to answer these children’s questions honestly. Explain to them that many people become addicted before they know the dangers of using tobacco and that it’s really difficult to stop using tobacco once you’ve started.

## **ASSESS** (Have a silent dialogue with yourself)

Try to answer the following questions:

- What is the level of the child's understanding regarding the risks of tobacco use?
- What are the risk factors in his/her life and environment?
- How at-risk is the child to become a tobacco user?
- What can I do to increase the child's understanding of tobacco use and its consequences?

## **ASSIST**

To assist in your child's understanding of tobacco use, be sure to maintain open lines of honest communication that emphasizes your willingness to talk about anything your child wants to discuss.

1. Set clear parameters and expectations in regard to the child not using tobacco. By being direct, they'll appreciate your honesty and guidance. For example, you might say, "I do not want you to smoke, or use any form of tobacco."
2. Empower children to be able to make those healthy choices. Trust them to make good decisions. You might tell the child that:
  - "I trust you and know you will make good choices in life. This is an important choice and one that will affect not just you, but the rest of the family."
  - "I know there are older kids that use tobacco and if they offer it to you, I want you to say 'no thank you,' then come tell me. I'll help you with this."
3. Teach them to say "no," and have them practice avoiding tobacco in different ways, such as:
  - Using a direct "NO WAY!"
  - Making a joke.
  - Giving a reason for not wanting to use tobacco.
  - Just walking away from the person offering tobacco.

## **ACTION**

We believe that the most important A is Action, what you as a parent can do. Open communication channels with your child by participating in an AIA Academy coach clinic or parent workshop. Here are some other important steps to take:

- Teach, enforce, advocate, and model appropriate behaviors.

- **Teach** children the harmful effects of tobacco use.
  - **Enforce** consequences for tobacco use.
  - **Advocate** that being involved in sporting activities is a much healthier lifestyle to lead.
  - **Model** appropriate behaviors. For children to avoid the pressures of tobacco use, it takes both courage and your assistance.
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- Look to access other resources that may help you create healthy sport experiences for children. For example, the AIA Academy offers Healthy Lifestyle Information at [www.aiaacademy.org](http://www.aiaacademy.org) or at [www.fundamentallyhealthy.org](http://www.fundamentallyhealthy.org) .
  - For more specific information on tobacco education and prevention, visit the Arizona Department of Health Services Tobacco Education and Prevention Program website at [www.azdhs.gov/phs/tepp/index.htm](http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/tepp/index.htm) .