

# Tobacco Prevention & Youth Engagement

A Guide for Parents  
and/or Guardians

A quick reference tobacco prevention guide for adults who provide parental care, in its many forms, to Oklahoma youth.



**OKLAHOMA**  
State Department  
of Health

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# Engage | Support | Empower

The overwhelming majority of individuals begin using tobacco products by age 18. Unfortunately, Oklahoma has a history of high prevalence of tobacco use and a high incidence of tobacco-related diseases, with 7,500 Oklahomans dying each year from their own smoking.<sup>1</sup> Oklahoma's youth continue to smoke and use new products at an alarming rate. Tobacco use among youth nationwide stands at 18%<sup>2</sup>; while Oklahoma is above the national average with 21.7% of high school students reporting current use of electronic vapor products.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to highlight that these are self-reported numbers, as a result, we are compelled to believe that the percentage of current users would be greater if the users who did not self-report were included. As the popularity of e-cigarettes and vapor products among youth continues to increase, it is important to emphasize that no amount of nicotine is safe for youth consumption. Nicotine exposure during adolescence can harm the developing brain by not only increasing the risk of addiction, but by shortening attention spans, and reducing their ability to retain information.

Tobacco companies spend approximately \$9.1 billion each year to promote their products by using the retail environment as the primary channel to market, advertise, and promote products.<sup>1</sup> Flavored products, pricing gimmicks, and strategic product placement are all used to attract the underage buyer; your underage buyer. The hard truth is that tobacco companies desperately want to addict a new generation of “replacement smokers” in order to continue to generate revenue. Consider this scathing remark from former U.S. District Court Judge Gladys Kessler: “Since the 1950s to the present, different defendants, at different times and using different methods, have intentionally marketed to young people under the age of twenty-one in order to recruit ‘replacement smokers’ to ensure the economic future of the tobacco industry.”<sup>3</sup>

Oklahoma preempts, or prevents, communities from enacting local ordinances that are more stringent, or differ from, Oklahoma state tobacco control laws related to advertising, smoke-free indoor air, and youth access. Public health strategies are needed to address the state's existing geographic, ethnic, and income related tobacco disparities. Overall, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and its partners aim to prevent youth initiation, increase successful cessation attempts, and address the enforcement and compliance of youth tobacco access laws in Oklahoma by implementing evidence-based tobacco control interventions that will reduce community, social, and environmental norms that lead to experimentation and regular tobacco use.

As a parent and/or guardian of an Oklahoma youth, there is plenty that you can do to help protect and support your loved one. We are here to help. This guide serves as a resource to assist you in your efforts to prevent your child's use of tobacco, including e-cigarettes. If they are currently using, we are outlining tools to assist you in helping them quit. For more information about the toll of tobacco in Oklahoma or additional assistance on how to utilize this resource guide, please contact the Oklahoma State Department of Health's Chronic Disease Prevention Services at [TobaccoPrevention@health.ok.gov](mailto:TobaccoPrevention@health.ok.gov).

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<sup>1</sup> The Toll of Tobacco in the United States (2018, Nov. 16). Retrieved February 3, 2023 from <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/problem/toll-us/oklahoma>.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). Available at <https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> United States v Philip Morris, 449 F Supp 2d 1 (D. D. C. 2006).

# Youth and Tobacco Use: What Parents Need to Know

## How old must someone be to legally purchase tobacco products in Oklahoma?

The minimum age in which to legally purchase tobacco, including e-cigarettes, is 21.

## What are the most commonly used products by youth?

E-cigarettes have been the most commonly used tobacco product among U.S. youth since 2014. Currently, disposable e-cigarettes are being used at a higher rate than the reusable pod-based variety.

## What are e-cigarettes?

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are battery-powered devices that deliver chemicals, flavorings, and other ingredients to the user. Using e-cigarettes is sometimes called “vaping.” E-cigarettes do not create harmless “water vapor” – they create an aerosol that contains harmful chemicals with the most notable being nicotine.

## Are e-cigarettes safer than combustible cigarettes?

According to the American Heart Association, no, vaping is not a safe alternative to smoking. People who do not currently smoke or use tobacco products should not use e-cigarettes. The long-term health effects are not yet understood, but the science clearly indicates that vaping is not a safe or healthy alternative to smoking as vapes contains highly addictive nicotine, heavy metals, and other harmful chemicals known to cause cancer, lung disease, and other ailments.

## What do e-cigarettes look like?

While they come in many shapes and sizes, and can look like regular cigarettes, pipes or cigars, it is important to know that they can also look like commonly used items such as USB flash drives, highlighters, and/or markers. Some are reusable and pod based, while others are disposable.



# Youth and Tobacco Use: What Parents Need to Know

## How much nicotine is in an e-cigarette?

Because of the growing amount of e-cigarette manufacturers, the nicotine levels in e-cigarettes will vary, with some reaching levels near that of combustible cigarettes. For example, the amount of nicotine in one standard JUUL® cartridge is roughly equal to the amount of nicotine in a full pack of cigarettes.

## What are the legal consequences for me and my child if they are caught with tobacco products?

There is now no penalty for the parent(s) of youth who are caught using. In addition, there are also no fines for the child; instead, they are required to attend a course about tobacco addiction through the Alcoholic Beverage Laws Enforcement (ABLE) Commission. The law also requires parents to be notified.

## How do I talk to my child about nicotine products?

There is truly no “one size fits all” approach when it comes to speaking with youth about anything, including tobacco use. They are complex beings with a plethora of changes going on both physically, emotionally, and mentally. With that being said, it is generally best to keep the following in mind as a framework for the conversation. 1. Frame vaping as a health concern as opposed to a discipline problem (they will be much more interested in solving their health issue than they will be in solving your discipline problem), 2. Position yourself as their ally and not something or someone else they are fighting against, and 3. Have a conversational tone, not a lecturer tone.

## My child is addicted; how can I support their efforts to become tobacco free?

In addition to simply being supportive and positioning yourself as an ally, encourage them take advantage of *My Life, My Quit*. This is a free and confidential text message based resource that helps teens quit using for good. Have them visit *My Life, My Quit*, or text “Start My Quit” to 36072. For those over 18, the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline (1-800-QUIT NOW or okhelpline.com) is available 24/7. The Helpline provides free text and email support, phone and web coaching, and free nicotine replacement therapy for registered participants.

## Who do I contact if I become aware of a retailer illegally selling tobacco products to underage buyers?

Please report the retailer to the Alcoholic Beverage Laws Enforcement (ABLE) Commission at 1-866-894-3517, Option 1.

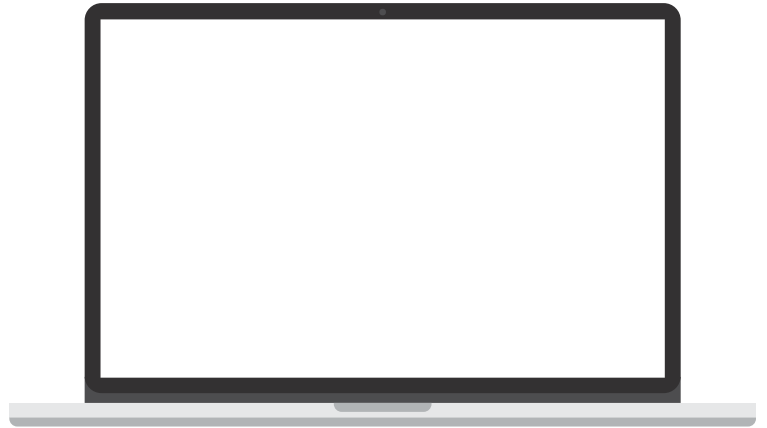
# Free Tobacco Use Prevention Resources

## Food and Drug Administration: Vaping Prevention and Education

**Target audience: Children between 11-18 years old.**

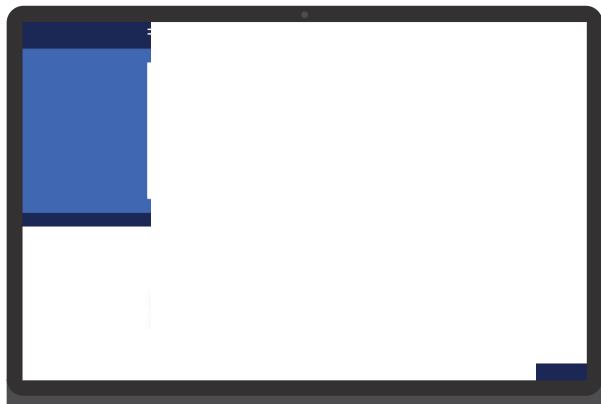
The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Tobacco Products sees a future in which tobacco-related disease is part of America's past, helping ensure a healthier life for every family. Their aim for this resource center is to help advance this vision by providing science-based, accessible materials to adults who positively influence the lives of youth.

- Expert advice on starting conversations about the harms of vaping.
- Online and community resources to help youth quit using e-cigarettes.
- Learn to recognize vaping products.



## American Lung Association: Talk About Vaping

**Target audience: Children between 10-18 years old.**



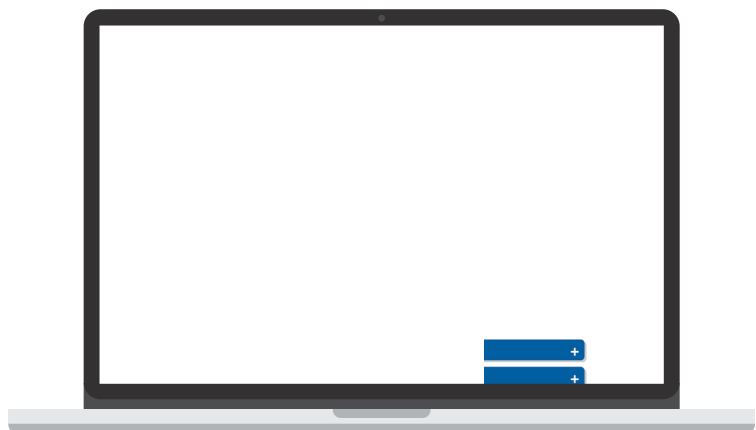
The American Lung Association knows that parents play a primary role in protecting their children from the dangers of vaping and nicotine addiction. Because of that, in conjunction with pediatric medical practitioners, they developed a vaping conversation guide that is designed to assist parents with speaking to their children about vaping and nicotine dependence.

- Tips on what to consider before, during, and after speaking to your children.
- Robust vaping conversation guide that features print and/or electronic versions.
- Provides a thorough vaping fact sheet that allows parents to be confident and prepared for the conversation.

# Free Tobacco Use Prevention Resources

## CATCH My Breath: Parent Resources

Target audience: Children between 10-18 years old.



CATCH My Breath is a best-practices youth e-cigarette program developed by The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health. Amongst its many offerings, the program provides parents with print and video resources that can be used to help them equip their children with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about the use of e-cigarettes. The parent resources can be used in conjunction with, or independent of, the school lead prevention program.

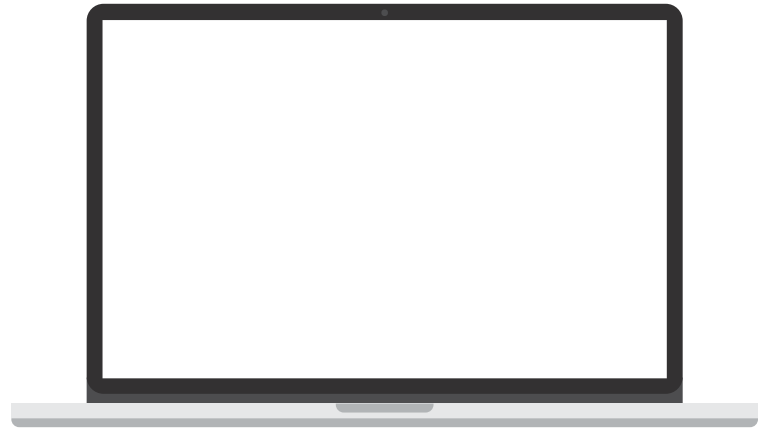
- Parent toolkit that contains a parent self-assessment that helps determine how “at risk” their child is of trying e-cigarettes.
- Talking points to help parents overcome the common roadblocks to talking with their children about vaping.
- Guided worksheet that allows parents to practice and/or rehearse their response to the tough questions their child might ask.

# Free Cessation Resources

## My Life, My Quit

**Target audience: Teens 13-17 years old.**

My Life, My Quit™ is a free and confidential way to quit smoking or vaping. Users just text, click to chat, or call their one-on-one quit coach to get guidance on coping with stress and cravings while building a personalized quit plan. The tips and non-judgmental support received is the reason why thousands of teens have joined.



## Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline

**Target audience: Anyone at least 13 years old.**



The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline (1-800-QUIT NOW or [okhelpline.com](https://okhelpline.com)) is a free service available 24/7. The Helpline provides free text and email support, phone and web coaching, and free nicotine replacement therapy for registered participants. Nicotine replacement therapy (nicotine patches, gum or lozenges) is only available for registered participants 18 and older, but free help is available for all Oklahomans.

## Smokefree.gov

**Target audience: Teens 13-17 years old.**

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) created Smokefree.gov to help you or someone you care about quit smoking. Smokefree.gov is a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' efforts to reduce smoking rates in the United States. The website offers numerous tools and tips on initiating cessation and remaining tobacco free, but most notably features a step-by-step guide for building a personalized "Quit Plan".





# Additional Resources and Information

All headers are clickable hyperlinks.

## Electronic Cigarettes

(cdc.gov)

## Is your kid using JUUL®? Here's how you can help them quit.

(truthinitiative.org)

## Three ways to support loved ones while they quit smoking

(truthinitiative.org)

## Talk with Your Teen About E-cigarettes: A Tip Sheet for Parents

(surgeongeneral.gov)

## 5 tips for handling nicotine withdrawal

(truthinitiative.org)

## E-cigarettes and Youth: What Parents Need to Know

(cdc.gov)

## E-cigarettes shaped like usb flash drives

(cdc.gov)

## Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

(tobaccofreekids.org)

## Tobacco

The Center for Black Health & Equity

## Tobacco Stops With Me

OK Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust

## Commercial Tobacco Cessation Programs

Keep It Sacred (itcni.org)



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