

# Knowledge Is Power: Teens & Tobacco

### What Are They Talking About?

Many of us past our teen years may believe we are really knowledgeable when it comes to teen culture. Surprisingly, it doesn't take long to be on the outside and clueless as to what our children are saying. Here are some helpful hints when it comes to teens and tobacco.

### Are There Common Street Names for Tobacco Products?

Yes, there are. Cigarettes can be called smokes, cigs or butts. Chew, dip, spit tobacco and snuff are common names for smokeless tobacco. You may be aware of these names. But what do you know about these terms?

B-40	Bidis (beedies)
Cocktail	Geek-joints
Primos	Smurf
Wollie	Kreteks

All of these terms have something to do with tobacco, and some of them are related to tobacco mixed with other drugs. One of the problems with tobacco is some of our children escalate their use of nicotine to other substances. You can find what these terms mean by going to the National Drug Control Policy website.

[[www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov)]

**Trainer Cigarettes**—We have the phenomena of “trainer cigarettes.” Unfortunately, many of our children believe that these are safer products, and because they are looked upon as natural products, they are more attractive to our children. Additionally, they are flavored. If you have visited a tobacco store or have been in some of our mini-marts, you will notice these products and the many flavors available to our children.

**Bidis (beedies)**—These are flavored cigarettes imported mainly from India. They are often sold in packs of 20 for about \$3.50. They resemble marijuana in appearance. Though they are smaller and contain less tobacco than regular cigarettes, they have quite a punch. They contain three times more nicotine and carbon monoxide and five times the tar. They are unfiltered. The temburi leaf, used to handroll these cigarettes and tied with colorful strings, doesn't burn easily. This forces the smoker to inhale harder. A smoker inhales 28 puffs for a bidi compared to 9 puffs per regular cigarette.

**Kreteks**—These are clove-flavored cigarettes. They are imported from Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries. They are a mixture of about 60% to 70% tobacco and 30% to 40% ground clove or clove oil. These have been touted as a safe alternative to cigarettes, but the truth is they deliver more nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide than regular cigarettes.

### Other Methods of Use

**Spit Tobacco**—Many times this is referred to as oral, dip, smokeless, chewing or snuff tobacco. Spit tobacco is being advertised as a more discrete form of tobacco use that has become more popular as smoking bans are enacted. These may be flavored. There are many people among us with the illusion that this is a safer alternative to smoking. There are risks associated with using these products. Cancers of the mouth, pharynx and esophagus are among these risks. White patches or red sores that appear in the mouth can turn into cancer. Decay of exposed tooth roots and gums pulling away from teeth have also occurred. Just because this form of tobacco isn't smoked, doesn't mean that the nicotine is less addictive.

**Snus Tobacco**—Snus, pronounced “snooze,” comes in a small pouch that is placed between the lip and gum. The powdered tobacco is pasteurized—not fermented—and contains less moisture and salt than moist snuff. It does not require the consumer to spit, the company says. It has the same risk potential as spit tobacco. It is sold as an alternative to smoking indoors. Slogans used to market this product include “flavor anytime” and “not cigs, not dip, new snus.”

**NicoFix**—This is a tobacco-based hand gel that contains nicotine and is being marketed to smokers who can't light up indoors. It is highly addictive and won't help smokers quit.

**Salvia Divinorum (sage of those who see God)**—This herb is known as “Sally D” on the streets. It is a naturally occurring tropical herb in the mint family with hallucinogenic properties that can be bought online or in some tobacco shops.

**Nicogel**—Nicotine in a hand gel is the latest anti-smoking alternative testing the market in Indiana. Manufacturers say Nicogel is designed to get smokers through those times when they can't smoke in public. It's not for those who want to quit. Targeting women, its makers say the purse-size packs that deliver nicotine straight across the skin can last up to four hours, reducing tobacco consumption by 400 fold. For now, a 10-pack of Nicogel sells for about \$6. Without question, these products are for adults only.

### How Are These Products Used by Children?

Tobacco products can be smoked, chewed, used with water pipes, and if powdered, sniffed.

The water pipes may be new to you. Have you heard of **hookah bars**? These have other risks associated with them besides the risk connected to tobacco use. First, a hookah bar is a tradition that started in Asia and the Middle East. Tobacco is mixed with honey, molasses or dried fruit in a water pipe and inhaled through a long hose. The pipe is passed around to all the folks sitting around the table. Second, the water doesn't remove the toxins as sometimes claimed. Concentrations of nicotine, carbon monoxide, tar and heavy metals are high or even higher than in regular cigarettes. Finally, there are risks with hookah bars that are different than with other forms of tobacco use. Tuberculosis, aspergillus infection and helicobacter (an ugly name for a bug that causes stomach ulcers) may be spread by sharing the pipe.

### Stealth Marketing

One of the ways the tobacco companies capture the youth market is to use candy-flavored tobacco and distribute scented promotional materials. While R.J. Reynolds claims to be marketing to “young adults,” their themes tap into the teenager's natural instinct for novelty and sometimes risk. The strategy appeals to the adolescent's desire to act grown-up. They've developed booze-flavored cigarettes with a gambling theme. You will see them marketed as **“Screwdriver Slots,” “Blackjack Gin”** and **“SnakeEyes.”**

Though agreement was reached with R.J. Reynolds on Oct. 11, 2006, to stop selling and marketing these products in the U.S., the agreement does not apply to cigarettes sold outside the U.S., and the advertising restrictions do not apply to cigarettes sold in adult-only venues or promotions.

### What's a Parent to Do?

Are you concerned? Don't discount your influence. Every child will face a conscious choice whether to smoke before they graduate from high school. According to a CASA study, a child who gets through to age 21 without smoking is almost certain to never use tobacco products in the future. The more available tobacco is, the more likely a child is to use it. Children are more likely to smoke when they believe that the harm associated with use is low.

You, the parents, hold the key to your children's decision about whether or not to smoke. Teens tell researchers that (37.7%) their parents would neither approve nor disapprove of their children smoking one or more packs of cigarettes a day, compared to teens who say parents strongly disapprove (10.6%). One of the lessons, our children have taught us, is that we must speak clearly and powerfully about our position on this and many other topics.

How close are you to your children? Parents who maintain a relationship with their children are less likely to have children who choose risky behaviors. You need to find ways to engage your children.

Here is a wonderful website [[www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com)] with suggestions to engage your children, especially in the area of speaking about the issues of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use and abuse. It will help you explore five different areas of needed connection with your children to increase their resistance to risky situations.

First, it talks about together time with your children. As we get busier and more things demand our time, this is an area that can suffer. Parents have time to take their children here and there, but it is the quality of the time that makes the difference. Do you actually have time to get to know your kids or are you always on the run and they're along for the ride? If you are to recognize changes in them that should be of concern, you need to know your children in order to recognize those differences.

Second, and this is a tough one, can you communicate with them? Certainly you need to have the discussion about friends and places where they hang out, but you also need to know and understand the new ways of communicating in the technological age. How up are you on text messaging language? Here's where your computer can help. Download translations.

Third, do you have credibility in the area of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use? We know that actions speak louder than words. Our children get plenty of double messages from society. You are their living and most important example. Are your actions consistent with your words?

Fourth, as a parent, you must speak clearly about your stance on tobacco, alcohol and other drug use. Your actions in this area validate your words. Parents say in the aftermath of a child involved with alcohol, tobacco and other drugs that they should have paid attention to the whispers in their hearts. Follow your suspicions.

And lastly, it isn't enough simply to prohibit a behavior. You catch more flies with honey. Does the quality time include an abundance of praise for your children's efforts to become the adults you hope them to be?

Following these simple basics helps children resist the temptations that abound in the culture.

For more information, contact:

**TobaccoFreeAllegheny**

[www.tobaccofreeallegheny.org](http://www.tobaccofreeallegheny.org)

412-322-8321