

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

Vaping

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Any Juuler of this generation doesn't quite understand that they are a guinea pig in a test on what the Juul's effects are on human health.

—Kate Livermore, [*The Roar*](#)

The Cool Kids Are Vaping...Safely?

“It’s safe!” “It’s less addictive!” “It can help you quit smoking!”

Sounds like a great product, right? Thanks to marketing like this, vaping is soaring in popularity. In fact, many teens have begun vaping, believing it to be a safer way to achieve a buzz and [look cool](#).

But is vaping really the side-effect-free way to ingest nicotine—a smoker’s dream come true? Or are users at risk of addiction, picking up real cigarettes, cancer, or worse?

Let’s look at what’s known about vaping, the controversy, and how to steward our children’s hearts to love God through their actions.

—— What exactly is vaping?

Vaping (i.e. the modern term for using e-cigarettes) is different from traditional cigarettes in that it relies on electricity rather than combustion. Instead of burning tobacco and other materials to create smoke, e-cigarettes have a battery that heats liquid into vapor (hence “vaping”).

—— What do you vape with?

Vaping devices are in many ways the [third generation of e-cigarettes](#) (or “electronic nicotine delivery systems” or “ENDS” in the medical community). Whereas the first e-cigarettes were very similar to regular cigarettes in appearance, the modern devices for e-smoking are not.

There are “vape pens,” which are cylindrical, but can be larger in size than cigarettes and come in different colors. Vape mods (short for “modified”) are box-shaped devices that are also larger than the typical cigarette. [Here’s a helpful chart](#) of the different types of vaping devices and their names.

Most [vaping devices now](#) have a longer battery life, hold more liquid, offer more customization, and provide a more enjoyable experience than their predecessors. For example, [vapers can purchase e-juice](#) in an extensive variety of flavors and can choose what amount of nicotine they want in their e-liquid.

—— What substances can be vaped?

As mentioned, e-liquids/e-juices can be vaped, and these can contain any number of things. It is possible to vape nicotine-free e-liquid, so one can vape without consuming the addictive substance.

In addition, marijuana (or just THC, the mind-altering substance in marijuana) can be vaped in the form of hash oils or even from the dried plant leaves. Because of the nature of vaping, [it doesn’t produce the same scent](#) as when marijuana is smoked, therefore allowing a user to go undetected.

Beyond that, a quick search of the internet [yields many lists](#) for different substances that can be vaped, including [nutmeg](#), [Salvia Divinorum](#), and [other illicit drugs](#) like [bath salts](#). Because of the nature of vaping, many users are willing to experiment with different liquids in their devices. This can be extremely dangerous to one's health and is not recommended, though teens may not realize the dangers and are more willing to experiment.

— Are teens vaping?

Yes. [The FDA reports](#) that “e-cigarette use rose from 1.5% to 16.0% among high school students and from 0.6% to 5.3% among middle school students from 2011 to 2015.” In some places, [even elementary-school-aged students](#) are vaping.

[Monitoring the Future](#), a national survey of 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders that's been conducted each year since 1975, recently found that 1 out of 3 high school seniors has tried vaping in the last year, while 1 out of 6 seniors has vaped in the last month. [Roughly 11%](#) reported having vaped hash oils (i.e. marijuana). Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (which funds the survey), characterizes it as a “very high and very fast uptake of electronic vaping devices.”

— Why the vaping craze?

There are a few reasons why we think vaping is growing in popularity:

1. Brands Market to Younger Users

Why is vaping so attractive to younger people? The [FDA found](#) that “in 2013–2014, 81% of current youth e-cigarette users cited the availability of appealing flavors as the primary reason for use.”

E-liquids come in a seemingly endless variety flavors. Sweet options, such as different types of fruit, dessert, or candy, are popular. The website Vapor4Life [offers e-liquids](#) in flavors that include Candy Crash, Sour Sweet, and Kiwi Apple Strawberry. Many vape shops and sites offer e-juices that are branded in a way that appears to intentionally market to younger users.

2. People See Vaping as a Safer Alternative to Smoking—and It Might Be

It's not possible to categorically state that vaping is safer than smoking. But there is some evidence that it is. In [this study from the National Center for Biotechnology Information](#), the authors observe that:

While there are certainly potential perils associated with vaping, smoking...is likely to be more dangerous than vaping, especially when considering the myriad of known toxins found in cigarette smoke and the diseases which they promote.

The same study adds that “the amount of nicotine finding its way into the bloodstream from vaping an e-cigarette has been shown to be less than what you would expect from smoking a conventional cigarette with comparable nicotine content.”

The researchers are very cautious, however, to point out that the evidence is not conclusive and that further studies in this area are needed. More on that later.

3. JUUL Has Entered the Mainstream

One type of vaping device that is especially popular among students is the [JUUL](#). JUUL's device is slim and sleek, resembling a flash drive, and the company offers [vape pods in the following flavors](#): mango, cool mint, Virginia tobacco, fruit medley, and crème brulee.

JUUL is only about two years old, but the company has been having [difficulty producing enough supplies](#) to keep up with demand, despite producing 20 million products monthly. [NPR reports](#) one student in Denver saying that while people associate vaping with a certain “crowd,” JUULing is mainstream.

One likely reason why JUULing is increasing in popularity among students is that its design makes it easy to hide. And because vapor doesn’t leave the odor that regular cigarettes do, it’s much more difficult for, say, school officials to identify when vaping has occurred in a particular location.

There also appears to be a perception that JUULing is safer than smoking regular cigarettes. This assumption could be supported by the evidence indicating that vaping is safer than traditional smoking. But again, the amount of nicotine in each JUULpod is significant.

If you were to go online to purchase an e-liquid, most vape sites would allow you to choose how much nicotine you would like in it. A common size for bottles of e-juice is 60 ml, although they can be larger or smaller (e.g., 30 ml or 120 ml). After selecting your flavor, you would then choose how much nicotine you want to add, such as 0 mg, 3 mg, or 6 mg.

In comparison, one JUULpod is 0.7 ml and its nicotine content is 59 mg/ml per pod. This is equivalent to the amount of nicotine in [one pack of cigarettes](#). So someone who vapes a JUULpod is almost certainly consuming a much higher amount of nicotine than the average vaper. **The result is that the most popular method for vaping among younger people also happens to be the way to vape the largest amount of nicotine at one time.**

4. Let’s Not Forget the Cool Factor

Part of the appeal of regular cigarettes has always been that they look cool, and the same is true of vaping.

Take as an example [this video of Austin Lawrence](#), so-called “Vape God.” Lawrence took up vaping in order to get over his addiction to cigarettes. He has since become an expert at manipulating vapor into a variety of spectacular shapes. As of this writing, Lawrence has around [1.2 million followers](#) on Instagram.

He even caught the attention of rapper Drake, who flew Lawrence out to his mansion just so Lawrence could teach him about vaping.

Why is it so controversial?

Unlike cigarettes, vaping has not been extensively researched and studied. In fact, the FDA is still trying to figure out how to classify and regulate electronic smoking. Because of the lack of definitive research, vaping has both its passionate supporters and detractors. Here’s a summary of the arguments both for and against it, as well as relevant research.

What Vaping Advocates Say

The most common argument that defenders of vaping put forward is that vaping is a better alternative to smoking regular cigarettes, which have toxic chemicals in them.

Employees at one local vape shop we visited said that helping smokers is an important part of what they do. It is also JUUL’s primary reason for existing, as stated on the company’s home page.

Those in the vaping industry are concerned about [the FDA’s recent moves](#) to regulate vaping more strictly. Their fear is that tighter regulations will hurt e-cigarette businesses and be

harmful to people who are trying to quit smoking. But are e-cigarettes really a good way to help people to stop smoking?

[England's National Health Service](#) says, "Public Health England's 2015 independent evidence review found that, based on the available evidence, vaping is around 95% less harmful than smoking." And [England's Royal College of Physicians](#) states that "e-cigarettes appear to be effective when used by smokers as an aid to quitting smoking."

[Another study](#) conducted collaboratively by institutions such as the CDC and University College London found evidence that former smokers who turned to e-cigarettes "have significantly lower levels of toxins than those who continue to smoke regular cigarettes." There is [additional research](#) that smokers who switched to e-cigarettes saw an increased life expectancy.

What Vaping Opponents Say

On the other side of the argument is the point that, while vaping might be better for you than traditional smoking, it is still not good for you. For one thing, nicotine is a [known addictive substance](#) that damages people's bodies. While consuming lower quantities of nicotine is better than taking in larger amounts, it's still better not to consume it at all.

Also, it is troubling that so little is known about the other chemicals present in e-liquids. Most companies don't list [every single ingredient in their e-juices](#), so people are unaware of exactly what chemicals they're consuming. That lack of transparency is in itself a problem. There is evidence that some of these chemicals, such as diacetyl, [can be harmful to vapers](#), as well as to those who consume the vapor second-hand.

And while there is evidence that suggests e-cigarettes help people stop smoking, there is also evidence indicating that e-cigarettes increase the likelihood that non-smokers will start smoking combustible cigarettes.

[A study by the American Academy of Pediatrics](#) "found that having used an e-cigarette in the past month significantly and strongly predicted combustible cigarette use," but that cigarette use did not predict the use of e-cigarettes.

A different [study from the American Journal of Medicine](#) found that e-cigarettes made it four times more likely that people would take up combustible cigarettes, versus the likelihood that non-users would take up smoking.

—— What should we conclude from this evidence?

Whatever the confusion surrounding the current research on vaping, we believe there are several conclusions we can draw about the use of e-cigarettes:

- While e-cigarettes are arguably better than regular cigarettes, it is still best for people not to smoke or vape at all.
- Minors should not be consuming nicotine because doing so is illegal.
- It is unwise to consume nicotine-free e-liquids because there is inconclusive research about the impact of the chemicals in them, and some of the research suggests that this impact is harmful.

— Ok, so how easy is it for minors to access vape products?

Federal law prohibits minors from purchasing and consuming nicotine. Vape shops and sites are not supposed to sell any products, with or without nicotine, to people who are underage. But if someone is resourceful enough, these restrictions are not, in the end, that restrictive.

[Here's a video](#) that one underage vaper made for his peers explaining how they can acquire vaping products without their parents knowing (warning: strong language). In the comments below the video, underage vapers give advice and discuss their experiences with trying to vape.

There are two main strategies the video's creator suggests. One is getting someone else to buy vape products for you. The other is ordering them online and figuring out how to get the package delivered without your parents being aware.

Students could send the package to a friend's house or come up with a reason for not showing it to their parents. For example, teens could order a gift for their parents (that they will actually give to them later) in addition to the vaping device. That way, the parents won't be suspicious when their kids hide the package from them.

What precautions are sites taking to ensure that minors don't buy nicotine underage? Some vape websites now require an SSN or a picture of a photo ID in order to verify the age of the person making the purchase.

But it's really not that difficult to sneak a parent's ID at an opportune moment. If students have PayPal accounts, they can make purchases without them showing up on a bank statement. Also, eBay (which does have JUUL products) doesn't require age verification for purchasing.

— And how easy is it to hide?

In a word, very—that is, if parents and other adults don't know what to look for. Often referred to as “stealth vaping,” there are plenty of websites (like [this](#) and [this](#)) and YouTube videos that offer tips and tricks for concealing one's habit. These include different inhalation techniques for minimizing vapor, less conspicuous devices to purchase, e-liquids that have less-obvious scents, and how-to guides for concealing devices in cups or bottles.

The bottom line is that if teens want to get away with vaping, they can and will, thanks to the Internet and current lack of regulations to keep minors from purchasing the products. The best thing we can do is educate ourselves, be alert, and never stop reminding our children that we want the absolute best for them, not just to keep them from having fun in the moment.

— What can I do to keep my kids from vaping?

There are a number of steps you can take as a parent to help your children avoid vaping.

1. Educate Yourself

First of all, you should educate yourself about vaping, which you're already doing by reading

this guide—so good job! You also can find a parent guide from the Surgeon General [here](#). The guide includes tips for talking to your kids about e-cigarettes.

2. Don't Assume Anything

It's important to be open to the idea that your children might currently be vaping without your knowledge or that they might be interested in doing so in the future. It would be naïve to assume there is no way they would do something like that. Be on the lookout for ways your children might be concealing a vaping habit.

Even if your children are not using e-cigarettes, it's still a good idea to talk to them about the issue. Vaping is popular among younger people, and there is a lot of misinformation floating around. It would benefit your kids to be educated about it.

3. Pursue Relationships with Your Kids

Ideally, a conversation with your children about vaping should take place within the broader context of your relationships with them. If you are pursuing and getting to know your kids, then you will have some idea of where they are spiritually. You'll be aware of their desires and struggles and have a greater likelihood of knowing whether or not they'd be prone to try vaping out.

4. React Out of Love, Not Condemnation

If you suspect or discover that your underage (or of age) children are vaping, it is crucial that you do not react out of anger or condemnation. Focus on understanding why they are vaping and/or why they hid their actions from you. The issue is not merely that they broke a rule; it's that by doing so, they are not loving God with their whole hearts or their neighbors as themselves. How can you encourage their **affections** in the right direction?

Also, keep the future in mind. One day, your kids will be able to legally consume nicotine. How can you encourage them to make wise choices when they are adults? It is essential you communicate that you are concerned about them vaping because you love them and because you don't want them or others to be hurt in any way.

— How do I talk to my kids about vaping?

When discussing vaping with your kids, consider these angles: our spiritual obligations to God and others, our legal responsibilities, and the importance of living with wisdom.

Does God say consuming nicotine is a sin? No, but the Bible does say a lot about self-control. It talks about being good stewards of what God has given us and emphasizes loving God and our neighbors. It mentions honoring our governing authorities.

And even if something isn't morally wrong, that doesn't mean we should do it. In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul writes that while all things are lawful, he will not let anything master him. We should make all of our decisions out of reverence for God and love towards those around us.

Here are some questions you might raise when you talk with your children:

- What do you know about vaping? Do your friends vape, and if so, why? Have you ever been interested in vaping?

- Why, in general, do you think people like to vape? Why do some people vape nicotine-free e-liquids? Do you think they have good or valid reasons for doing so?
- How often do you think we make decisions about our habits based on how those habits will affect those around us? Is it practical to expect people to do that with all their habits?
- Why do some people vape even though doing so is illegal? What does this say about their view of authority? Can you think of laws that might seem trivial that Christians are comfortable with breaking? If so, why do you think this is the case?
- What are characteristics of someone who has a habit of self-control? Consider any area of life—time, money, relationships, food, etc. What do you observe about people who don't live with self-control?
- Do you think there is a valid place for vaping if someone is using it to stop an addiction to regular cigarettes? Why or why not?
- How can we have wisdom with what we put into our bodies? Discuss what this might look like when it comes to the food we eat or even the amount of caffeine we consume.

— Final thoughts

As a parent, you are probably already aware that, while you can do your best to protect your kids, you can only do so much. You simply cannot control everything that happens to them, and you can't make their decisions for them. They will probably go through temptations and trials of which you have no knowledge. Some far more troubling than vaping.

This is a scary truth. But it comes with another truth that is just as real and is immensely encouraging: God does know everything that is going on with your kids, and He is actively engaged in their life, whether they recognize His presence or not. He knows them, loves them, and also wants the best for them. As parents, our task in all of this is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He leads and guides our children into a deeper knowledge of and relationship with Christ.

We know a woman who is a retired school administrator, as well as a mother and grandmother. She says that when her kids were growing up, there were times when the Holy Spirit would wake her up in the middle of the night and prompt her to intercede for them. She didn't know why, but she would stand outside her kids' bedroom doors and pray for them.

Most of what she prayed for still remains unknown to her, and some she didn't find out about for years. But God was working in the lives of her children nevertheless. She has observed many times that God is faithful to work out His testimony in the lives of the people she knows.

In Eph. 6 where Paul famously describes the armor of God, he says that our battle is not "against flesh and blood," but "against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (6:12). Christians should therefore pray "at all times in the Spirit" and "keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" (6:18).

Do not underestimate the ability you have to influence and protect your children through seeking the Lord on their behalf. Despite everything else we've said in this guide, this is probably the most important advice we have to offer. As parents, we are in divine cooperation with God in the teaching, admonition, and training of our children. **God, the Father, loves our children even more than we do, and He is able to do more than we ask, think, or even imagine.**

Resources

2016 Surgeon General's Report: [E-Cigarette Use among Youth and Young Adults](#)

[What are "ENDS"?](#) (A resource for physicians, but contains helpful info)

["Quick Facts about ENDS"](#) (from the American Academy of Pediatrics)

["E-cigarette use triples among middle and high school students in just one year"](#) (CDC report)

["Vaping: How E-cigs Work \(Infographic\)"](#)

["E-Cigarettes: What Vaping Does to Your Body"](#)

["E-Cigarette Vapor—Even when Nicotine-Free—Found to Damage Lung Cells"](#)

["E-Cigarettes May Lure Teens into Traditional Smoking"](#)

["Electronic Cigarette Sales to Minors via the Internet"](#) (scholarly article that looks at how easily e-cigs and vaping devices can be acquired by minors. Spoiler alert: very easily)

["Vaping Regulations, State by State"](#) (*warning*: from vapes.com, which sells vaping products and gives notifications when people purchase something from their site, but is regularly updated with accurate info about vaping regulations)

["What is Vaping? Learn the Basics and the Secrets"](#) (*warning*: from vapingdaily.com, which is pro-vaping, but offers helpful material that any teen with access to the internet can easily find)

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