

START TALKING
BEFORE THEY
START DRINKING

Prevent Underage Drinking:

What To Know, What To Say, What To Do

Start Talking Before They Start Drinking

A Family Guide

PDF Version

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You Are the Most Powerful Influence on Your Child's Behavior

Underage drinking can have serious consequences. You can protect your children from the risks associated with drinking by maintaining open communication and expressing a clear, consistent message about alcohol. Building a close relationship with your kids will encourage them to come to you for help in making decisions that impact their health and well-being. This guide provides facts and practical advice on how to talk with your children about underage drinking. It helps you create household rules to support your values.

Society gives children mixed messages about alcohol. Make sure that your children get their information from the best resource available

What You Need to Know

Underage Drinking

Many kids start drinking in middle school.¹

> One out of every two 8th graders has tried alcohol.²

> More kids use alcohol than use tobacco or illicit drugs.³

> More children are killed by alcohol than all illegal drugs combined.⁴

> **Children who begin drinking alcohol before the age of 15 are 5 times more likely than those who start after age 21 to develop alcohol problems.**⁵

> The chances of becoming dependent decrease by 14% for each year of delay in the onset of alcohol use.⁶

Alcohol and Judgement

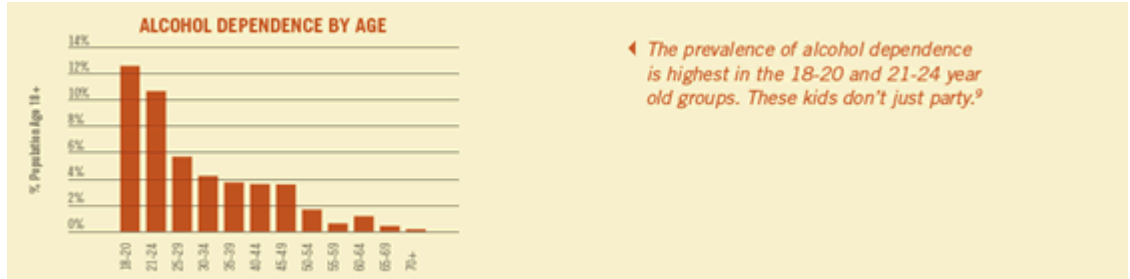
The teenage brain is still developing. Alcohol can impair the parts of the brain that control the following:⁷

> Motor coordination. This includes the ability to walk, drive and process information.

> Impulse control. Drinking lowers inhibitions and increases the chances that a person will do something that they will regret when they are sober.

> Memory. Impaired recollection and even blackouts can occur when too much alcohol has been consumed.

> Judgement and decision making capacity. Drinking may lead young people to engage in risky behaviors that can result in illness, injury, and even death.⁸



Risks

*Alcohol use among youth is strongly correlated with violence, risky sexual behavior, poor academic performance and other harmful behaviors.*¹⁰

VIOLENCE

> Children who start drinking before age 15 are 12 times more likely to be injured while under the influence of alcohol and 10 times more likely to be in a fight after drinking, compared with those who wait until they are 21.¹¹

SEXUAL ACTIVITY

> Alcohol use by teens is a strong predictor of both sexual activity and unprotected sex.¹²
 > A survey of high school students found that 18% of females and 39% of males say it is acceptable for a boy to force sex if the girl is high or drunk.¹³

Family Influence

“What parents may not realize is that children say that parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink.”

Charles Curie, SAMHSA Administrator
 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Teen perceptions of immorality, parental disapproval, and harm to health are far more powerful deterrents to teen smoking, drinking, and drug use than legal restrictions on the

SCHOOL

> Teens who use alcohol have higher rates of academic problems and poor performance than non-drinkers.¹⁴
 > Among eighth-graders, higher truancy rates are associated with greater rates of alcohol use in the past month.¹⁵

ILLICIT DRUG USE

> More than 67% of young people who start drinking before the age of 15 will try an illicit drug. Children who drink are 7.5 times more likely to use any illicit drug, more than 22 times more likely to use marijuana, and 50 times more likely to use cocaine than children who never drink.¹⁶

DRIVING

> When young people drink and get into a car, they tend to make poor decisions that impact their safety.¹⁷
 > Traffic crashes are the number one killer of teens and over one-third of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related.¹⁸

You have more influence over your children than you may realize. Kids spend a lot of time with friends, television, music and magazines. But they are also tuned in to you. Your words and actions impact them in many ways every day.

> Research studies indicate that children are less likely to drink when their parents are involved in their lives and when they and their parents report feeling close to each other.²⁰

> You can influence your children's behavior by observing the rules of a moderate drinker or by not drinking.²¹

> Your older children also influence their younger brothers and sisters. Older siblings' alcohol use can influence the alcohol use of younger siblings

*purchase of cigarettes and alcohol or the illegality of using drugs like marijuana, LSD, cocaine, and heroin.*¹⁹

in the family, particularly for same sex siblings.²²

*For adults who choose to drink, moderation is defined as no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks per day for men.*²³

What You Need to Say

Alcohol and Underage Drinking

Your children need information to make good decisions. Don't wait until a problem arises to talk to them about drinking alcohol. Be sure to tell your child:

THE BODY²⁴

- > With the first sip of alcohol, the drinker is affected.
- > Alcohol passes through the lining of the stomach into the bloodstream. It irritates the stomach lining, which can make a person feel sick. If drinking continues, the person may vomit.
- > Alcohol moves through the bloodstream to every organ in the body, including the brain.
- > Once alcohol enters the brain, it changes the way a person behaves. Alcohol can make people do things they do not want to do.
- > As a person drinks more alcohol, the ability to make decisions is affected. The drinker also may lose balance and be unable to see or speak clearly. The more alcohol a person drinks, the worse the effects can be.
- > Alcohol can have lasting effects on the brain, impairing how a person learns, thinks, and remembers.
- > Alcohol can kill. When a person drinks too much alcohol in a very short period, alcohol poisoning can occur. Breathing gets difficult. A person can vomit, pass out, or even die.
- > Some people get addicted to alcohol. They drink more and more as they get used to the alcohol. But they can stop and recover.

Your Family Beliefs & History Around Alcohol

Discuss your personal beliefs with your child. Sharing your values and family history around alcohol will create an environment of trust and

PEERS

- > Children often think that other people their age are drinking regularly, but most are not.²⁵
- > Alcohol can hurt your child—even if he or she is not the one drinking. If your child is around people who are drinking, he or she has an increased risk of being seriously injured or affected by violence. At the very least, your child may have to deal with someone who is sick, out of control, or unable to take care of themselves.²⁶
- > As children get older, some of their friends may start drinking, and may get into trouble from drinking too much. Tell your child that there is help for people who have alcohol problems. It is OK to get help.

THE LAW

- > It is illegal for anyone to buy or possess alcohol until 21 years of age.
- > Even one drink can cause a person to fail a breath test. In some states, people under age 21 who have been drinking can have their driver's license suspended, be subject to a heavy fine, or have their car permanently taken away.²⁷

IF YOU DON'T DRINK

- > Explain your reasons for not drinking, whether they are religious, health related, or due to family history.
- > Encourage your children to talk with you if they have questions about why you choose not to drink.

understanding.

IF YOU DRINK

> Explain your rules for drinking responsibly and in moderation.

> Tell your children that some people should not drink alcoholic beverages at all. These include:²⁸

- Children and adolescents.
- Individuals of any age who cannot restrict their drinking to moderate levels. This is a special concern for recovering alcoholics and people whose family members have alcohol problems.
- Women who are trying to conceive or who are pregnant.
- People who plan to drive or take part in activities that require attention or skill.
- People using prescription and over-the-counter medications.

> Be clear that you do not want your children to drink alcohol until they are 21 years old.

> When they are 21, if they decide to drink, they should do in moderation.

Your Family Beliefs & History Around Alcohol

IF SOMEONE IN THE FAMILY DRINKS TOO MUCH OR IS IN RECOVERY

If your family has a history of alcoholism, your children need to know that they are at a greater risk for problem drinking.

> Discuss what drinking responsibly means, and that some people are unable to drink alcohol at all without drinking to excess.

> Explain that alcoholism is a progressive disease that is a combination of physical addiction and mental obsession with drinking.

> Communicate the importance of abstaining from alcohol. Tell your children that they need to delay drinking for as long as possible and recommend that they not drink at all. Explain that the older they are before they take a drink, the lower the chances that they will have problems with alcohol.

> Let your children know that drinking under the legal age of 21 is a major risk for people with a family history of alcohol.

> Inform them that there are successful treatment options for people who drink and develop problems with alcohol, and that you support family members who are in recovery.

> Be clear that you do not want them to drink alcohol.

> Explain that when they are 21, if they should decide to drink, they should do so in moderation.



HELP IS AVAILABLE

> SAMHSA National Drug Information Treatment and Referral Hotline

800-662-HELP (4357) • dasis3.samhsa.gov
Information, support, treatment options, and referrals to local rehab centers for any drug or alcohol problem. Operates 24 hours, seven days a week.

> SMART Recovery

866-951-5357 • smartrecovery.org
SMART (Self-Management And Recovery Training) helps people who choose to abstain from alcohol or addictive substances by teaching how to change self-defeating thoughts and actions.

> National Youth Crisis Hotline

800-442-HOPE (4673) • 1800hithome.com
Provides counseling and referrals to local drug treatment centers, shelters, and counseling services. Operates 24 hours, seven days a week.

> Alateen

800-344-2666 • al-anon.alateen.org
Alateen is a recovery program for young people which helps families and friends of alcoholics recover from the effects of living with a problem drinker.

> National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA)

888-554-COAS • nacoa.org

NACoA's mission is to advocate for all children and families affected by alcoholism and other drug dependencies.

Be aware of what is going on in your home. Two out of three teens aged 13-18 said it is easy to get alcohol from their own homes without their parents knowing it.³⁰

What You Need to Do

Take Action

There are six actions you can take today to help keep your child alcohol free.

TALK EARLY AND OFTEN WITH YOUR CHILD

- > Establish and maintain an open line of communication.
- > Get into the habit of talking with your child every day. This will make it easier for you to have conversations about serious subjects when necessary.

GET INVOLVED

- > Talking with your child about his or her activities opens up an opportunity for you to share your interests and values.
- > Young people are much less likely to have mental health and substance abuse problems when they have positive activities to do and when caring adults are involved in their lives.

BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

- > Think about what you say and how you act in front of your child. Your own actions are the most powerful indicator to your children of what is appropriate and acceptable in your family.
- > Do not take part in illegal, unhealthy, or dangerous practices related to alcohol, tobacco, or drugs or your child may believe that these practices are OK no matter what you say.

Set Clear Rules About Alcohol

Set clear rules about alcohol.

BE SPECIFIC

- > Tell your children what the law is, what your household rules are, and what behavior you expect. For example, "Alcohol is for adults. Do not drink alcohol until you are 21. Our family follows the law."

BE CONSISTENT

TEACH KIDS TO CHOOSE FRIENDS WISELY

- > Teach your child how to form positive relationships.
- > Help your child to understand what qualities to look for in a friend.

MONITOR YOUR CHILD'S ACTIVITIES

- > Know where your children are and get acquainted with their friends.
- > Limit the amount of time your children spend without an adult being present. Unsupervised children have more opportunities to experiment with risky behaviors, including the use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs, and they may start substance abuse at earlier ages.

SET RULES

- > Make clear, sensible rules for your child and enforce them with consistency and appropriate consequences.
- > Following these rules can help protect your child's physical safety and mental well-being, which can lower his or her risk for substance abuse problems.

RECOGNIZE GOOD BEHAVIOR

- > Always let your children know how pleased you are when they respect the rules of the household.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

- > Write out your most important family rules and post them clearly where they are seen often by everyone in the family. Then review the rules regularly with your family on your children's birthday or at the beginning of the school year.

> Be sure your children understand that the rules are maintained at all times, and that the rules hold true even at other people's houses. Follow your own rules.

BE REASONABLE

> Don't change the rules in mid-stream or add new consequences without talking to your children. Avoid unrealistic threats.

Activities

Play Reporter

Use these questions to interview your child and then let your child interview you. Let your child's questions and answers lead you into a longer conversation. Remember to change the questions as needed based on your child's age. For example, you might ask a teenager about his or her future goals, but you might ask a younger child, "What do you want to be when you grow up? Why?" Be sure to practice active listening by showing interest in what your child says; this will validate your child's feelings. If your child says something you don't agree with, respond positively and try to find a constructive answer. Make sure your child knows your beliefs.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What three words would you use to describe yourself? To describe me?
2. Who are some of your role models? What do you admire about these people?
3. What scares or concerns you? What makes you happy?
4. What are your future goals?
5. How would drinking alcohol get in the way of your future goals?
6. What would you do if you were offered alcohol at a party?
7. What would you do if the person responsible for driving you has been drinking alcohol?
8. What would you really like to ask me but are too afraid to talk about?

Think/Say/Feel

PARENTS

Use the enclosed pages to imagine that you are having a dialog with your child. This exercise will prepare you to speak openly with your child and will help you to anticipate his or her reaction to your ideas. Be as realistic as possible.

> Write down what you would think, say, and feel while having a conversation about underage drinking with your child.

Think/Say/Feel

CHILDREN

Talking with your parents about underage drinking can be challenging. This exercise will prepare you to speak openly to your mom or dad about underage drinking and will help you to anticipate what your parent's reaction might be. Be as realistic as possible.

> Write down what you would think, say, and feel while having a conversation about underage

- > Now write down what you imagine your child is going to think, say and feel.
- > Share your answers with your child.

- drinking with your parent.
- > Now write down what you imagine your mom or dad is going to think, say and feel.
- > Share your answers with your parent.

Family Rules

Many families give mixed messages to their children about underage drinking. This exercise will help you share your beliefs and family values about alcohol use and allow you to create a set of rules. Are there differences between your spoken and unspoken rules about underage drinking? Are there differences between your perception of these rules and your child's perception? How can you eliminate any inconsistencies? Write out your answers to these questions independently and then discuss them together.

WHAT THE PARENT THINKS:

Spoken Rule:

Unspoken Rule:

WHAT THE CHILD THINKS:

Spoken Rule:

Conclusion

Let your children know how important they are to you. Be honest with them about the facts and consequences of underage drinking. Your ongoing involvement, care, and concern will help your children to stay safe.

Support your children's future — keep them alcohol free.

Unspoken Rule:

NOW WRITE A CLEAR SET OF FAMILY RULES ABOUT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION.

What the law is:

What our family rule is:

What behavior we expect:

www.stopalcoholabuse.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Human Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Family.samhsa.gov

A public education Web site, developed to support the efforts of parents and other caring adults to promote mental health and prevent the use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs among 7- to 18-year-olds.

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

www.niaaa.nih.gov

NIAAA provides leadership in the national effort to reduce alcohol-related problems by conducting and supporting research; coordinating and collaborating with other research institutes and Federal Programs; and translating and disseminating research findings to health care providers, researchers, policymakers, and the public on

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

www.ncadi.samhsa.gov

NCADI is the Nation's one-stop resource for information about substance abuse prevention and addiction treatment. The Anti-Drug

TheAntiDrug.com

www.theantidrug.com

serves as a drug prevention information center, and a supportive community for parents to interact and learn from each other.

alcohol-related issues

Sites for Kids

www.freevibe.com

www.nacoa.org

www.al-anon.alateen.org

www.thecoolspot.gov

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What you're...

THINKING:

SAYING:

Feeling:

What you're...

THINKING:

What your child is...

THINKING:

SAYING:

Feeling:

What your child is...

THINKING:

SAYING:

SAYING:

Feeling:

Feeling:
