

# The Truth About Alcohol

The average middle or high school student knows enough about alcohol to be curious about it, but not enough to recognize how dangerous it is. Teen alcohol use is epidemic. While use of marijuana, cocaine, and other illegal drugs has decreased, alcohol abuse by young people remains extremely high. Nearly 75% of all high school students have used alcohol and the age they had their first drink is much younger than you may think. Twenty-five percent of these young people reported binge drinking with five or more alcoholic drinks within a two-hour period. There are some simple but important steps that every parent should take to prepare young people for success in avoiding alcohol.

## Alcohol in Mass Media

Some parents are so used to seeing alcohol advertised in the media that they don't realize the impact it has on young people. Drinking is shown as a cool, fun activity that surrounds you with friends and is a normal part of sporting events. Drunkenness is shown as a consequence-free source of humor. These false images of alcohol combined with peer pressure from friends is a dangerous mix.

## Dangers of Intoxication

A young person who becomes intoxicated by alcohol has no idea how his body and mind are impaired. Young people who drink are more likely to be victims of violent crime and have school-related problems. Although drunk driving is the major cause of death and injury among people under 21, a drunk young person can lose his life simply by walking into the street or injuring himself in his own home. A child's first time getting drunk could be the last choice that he or she ever makes.

## Children At Highest Risk For Alcohol:

- Have a negative example of alcohol use from others in their home
- Lack strong guidance against alcohol from adults they respect
- Feel the need to drink in order to make friends and improve their self-image
- See drinking as a way to get attention
- Aren't prepared to face pressure from friends
- Have a false image of drinking from the media
- Don't know how alcohol can hurt them



## RESOURCES

The Partnership to End Addiction:

855-DRUGFREE or 855-378-4373

[www.drugfree.org/prevention-and-taking-action-early](http://www.drugfree.org/prevention-and-taking-action-early)

National Institute on Drug Abuse - Parenting Resources:

[www.nida.nih.gov/research-topics/parents-educators](http://www.nida.nih.gov/research-topics/parents-educators)

Alcohol Abuse and Youth:

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

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

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

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10 THINGS  
YOU CAN DO TO KEEP  
YOUR CHILD ALCOHOL FREE



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## 1. Be Available and Proactive

The time to talk to your child about alcohol is before they face pressure or the opportunity to drink. Twenty percent of high school students reported that their first alcoholic drink (more than a few sips) was before the age of thirteen. Establish open communication and never brush off a conversation— make sure they know you're available at any time to talk.

## 2. Be Trustworthy

Don't use exaggeration or extreme scare tactics as they will most likely backfire. Admit your own mistakes, acknowledge that many adults drink, and honestly represent the dangers of alcohol.

## 3. Build Self-Confidence

A young person who is confident in his or her self-worth will find it easier to walk away from peer pressure than one who is constantly looking for a way to "fit in" and be accepted. Engage your child in activities that challenge them and build their self-confidence.

## 4. Prepare for Peer Pressure

If a child isn't ready to respond when offered alcohol, he or she is in danger of caving in to peer pressure. Role-playing is a good way for you to help your child develop responses that will quickly get them out of dangerous situations.

## 5. Know Your Child's Circumstances

Many times, a parent doesn't even know that their child is experimenting with alcohol until it's too late. A simple accountability and/or curfew system may be sufficient for your child to realize that you care about where he is going and what he is doing there. Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Create fun alcohol-free activities together.

## 6. Emphasize Legal Consequences

Drinking underage is a serious juvenile offense and leads to legal consequences. Besides the emotional trauma of being arrested and detained by police, a young person will gain a criminal history and experience trouble getting a job, driver's license, loans, acceptance into college, and other opportunities. Even worse, he or she could hurt someone else while under the influence of alcohol, resulting in penalties and even a prison sentence.



## 7. Discuss Medical Consequences

Don't assume that your child knows how alcohol can hurt him. Research and share with your child statistical evidence about kidney, stomach, and liver disease (including cancer), addiction, brain damage, and even relatively minor factors such as terrible breath odor. These physical dangers are even more serious for young people than they are for adults.

## 8. Dangers of Drunkenness

When people get drunk, they are not aware of their inability to do certain things safely. For this reason, it is critical to inform your child of exactly how alcohol slows down the brain and lowers its defenses. Driving or riding in a car with a person who has been drinking is extremely dangerous. Make sure your children know the deadly consequences of drunk driving. Let them know that you will always pick them up or pay for a cab ride if they need it— without the threat of punishment.

## 9. Address Advertising/Media Representation

While tobacco products are largely excluded from the media, alcohol is aggressively advertised. Huge amounts of money are devoted to making alcohol attractive to adults, and young people get the message loud and clear. Be aware of what your child is hearing and seeing concerning alcohol, and counter it with accurate information.

## 10. Help Your Child Stop Drinking

If your child has already started drinking, do everything you can to help him stop. Frustration and surprise are natural reactions to the news that your child drinks alcohol; it is critical that you let him know that you are on his side. Give your child a safe place to turn. Don't hesitate to seek professional help when dealing with a child's alcohol abuse.



## Underage drinking is never acceptable

Underage alcohol abuse is not a fact of life or a right of passage. It is a dangerous activity that can lead to addiction, disability or death. When it comes to alcohol, even a little is too much.

Setting a good example and establishing honest and ongoing communication with your teen are foundation blocks to help your child resist underage drinking. Be clear with your teen what your expectations are and set clear guidelines and consequences. Help your child identify their life goals and desires and discuss how illicit alcohol abuse can negatively affect their future. You really can make a difference in helping your child resist alcohol and helping to ensure that he grows up to be a happy, productive, drug-free adult.

## Be Loving. Be Firm. Be Available. Be Clear. Be A Role Model.

