



Tips for Talking with Your Teen About Underage Drinking

It's not always easy to have a conversation with our kids about risky behaviors and our expectations and values. Below are top tips from health experts.

- Discuss the actual facts and risks of underage drinking. Try to avoid too many “fear” tactics -- the facts are scary enough.
- Aim for a discussion – not a lecture. Learn what your teen already knows about alcohol.
- Dispel any myths and misconceptions your teen may have about alcohol. Make sure your teen knows that alcohol has a very potent affect, especially on young people. Explain that people of all ages are very bad at judging how alcohol affects them, especially after they have had a drink or two.
- Ask your teen how he/she feels about underage drinking, and listen without interrupting. Don't react in a way that will cut off further discussion. If your teen makes statements that challenge or shock you, take a deep breath and try to continue the conversation calmly.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Be a good listener and encourage your children to ask questions. If you don't know an answer, offer to find out. Showing your willingness to listen will make your teen feel more comfortable about opening up to you.
- Discuss your expectations and rules about underage drinking, and be very clear about the consequences for breaking a rule. Remind your teen that the legal drinking age is 21, and underage drinking is illegal. They will face legal consequences for breaking the law.
- Tell your kids that drinking alcohol often makes people do things they later regret. This can affect a person's self-respect, damage relationships, and put goals at risk, such as employment and college admission.
- There is no “safe” level of alcohol use when it comes to teenagers. To keep your kids safe, adopt a “no use” policy. Make sure your kids know they are not allowed to drink at other people's homes either.
- As parents or caregivers, present a united front whenever possible, especially when it comes to your teen's safety and protection.
- Forget about being the “cool” parent. Parents who are overly permissive put their kids at higher risk of getting into trouble, including car accidents, violence, sexual behavior and substance abuse. Saying no to underage drinking does not make a parent less “cool.”
- Drinking is always dangerous for teens, even if it happens in a “safe place” and the teen will not be driving.
- Monitor and address sources of alcohol for teens in your community. Talk to school, city officials and other parents to learn more about where teens are getting alcohol, including sources such as young adults and commercial establishments.