



Tips for Parents on Underage Drinking

Research has shown that strong family ties help protect adolescents from alcohol and drug use. Follow these expert tips for parents:

- **Set a good example.** “Do as I say, not as I do” doesn’t cut it with teens. Adolescents can understand that some things are appropriate for adults but are not acceptable for teens. Keep that distinction sharp. Do not allow children to mix cocktails, bring you a beer or sip from your wine glass.
- **Emphasize your family values.** Talk about why qualities such as honesty, self-reliance and responsibility are important.
- **Make your opinions known.** Adolescents are less likely to use alcohol or drugs if they know their parents disapprove of teens using those substances. And start your talks early; the average age for first use of alcohol is 12 years old.
- **Set firm but reasonable rules.** Tell your child what behavior is expected. Explain the reasons for your rules and discuss the consequences for breaking them.
- **Be consistent.** Make it clear to your child that a no-alcohol rule remains in effect at all times: in your home, in a friend’s home, at a party, etc.
- **Get to know your child’s friends and the parents of your child’s friends.** Have all parents agree to uphold zero tolerance for alcohol and drugs in their homes and commit to notify one another if one of you becomes aware of a child who violates the pact.
- **Call parents whose home is to be used for a party.** Make sure no alcohol or drugs will be tolerated. Don’t be afraid to check out a party for yourself.
- **Be straightforward.** Tell your child that you know what happens among many teens, maybe even their friends, and discuss why your child should not participate in those activities. Point out the dangers of alcohol use.
- **Give your child a way out.** Discuss in advance how to contact you or another adult for a ride home if alcohol or drugs are being used at a party or if your child needs a ride home for any reason.
- **Don’t be naïve.** Watch for signs of abuse such as dropping grades, a sudden change in friends or missing money. If you sense a problem, seek professional help.

Sources:

- The U.S. Department of Education offers free copies of Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent’s Guide to Prevention. The publication is available online at www.health.org/pubs/parguide98/ or call 1–800–624–0100 to order.