

## How to Talk to Your Kids About Underage Drinking

Many parents are concerned about the issue of underage drinking and how to approach it with their children. The Office of Highway Safety has compiled some tips from the U.S. Department of Health and Social Services as well as the YMCA Resource Center DE and the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence on how to start the conversation.

It's not easy. Friends exert a lot of influence. Fitting in is a chief priority for teens, and parents often feel shoved aside. Kids will listen, however. Study after study shows that even during the teen years, parents have enormous influence on their children's behavior.

The bottom line is that most young teens don't yet drink. And parents' disapproval of youthful alcohol use is the key reason children choose not to drink. So make no mistake: You can make a difference.

Some ways to begin:

- Make it a conversation, not a lecture! To make the most of it, take some time to think about the issues you want to discuss before you talk with your child. Consider too how your child might react and ways you might respond to your youngster's questions and feelings. Then choose a time to talk when both you and your child have some "down time" and are feeling relaxed.
- Ask your young teen what he or she knows about alcohol and what he or she thinks about teen drinking. Ask your child why he or she thinks kids drink. Listen carefully without interrupting. Not only will this approach help your child to feel heard and respected, but it can serve as a natural "lead-in" to discussing alcohol topics.
- Ask open-ended questions. Encourage your teen to tell you how he or she thinks and feels about the issue you're discussing. Avoid questions that have a simple "yes" or "no" answer.
- Share important facts about alcohol. Although many kids believe that they already know everything about alcohol, myths and misinformation abound. Alcohol is a powerful drug that slows down the body and mind. It impairs coordination; slows reaction time; and impairs vision, clear thinking, and judgment.
- Share good reasons not to drink alcohol : Teens say the best way to persuade them to avoid alcohol is to **appeal to their self-respect**— let them know that they are too smart and have too much going for them to need the crutch of alcohol. It can interfere with getting good grades in school. It can negatively affect athletic performance. It can cause injury while

swimming or biking. It is illegal and may mean trouble with police, parents, and endanger future plans if its on your criminal record. Drinking is illegal. Because alcohol use under the age of 21 is illegal, getting caught may mean trouble with the authorities. Drinking also makes a young person more vulnerable to sexual assault and unprotected sex.

- Control your emotions. If you hear something you don't like, try not to respond with anger. Instead, take a few deep breaths and acknowledge your feelings in a constructive way.
- Don't try to "score points" on your teen by showing how he or she is wrong. If you show respect for your child's viewpoint, he or she will be more likely to listen to and respect yours.
- Help your child say no. The best way to say "no" is to be assertive—that is, say no and mean it. Stand up straight. Make eye contact. Say a firm "No thanks. I don't want to." Don't make excuses. Stand up for yourself.

Start talking with your children about the dangers of alcohol before they start drinking. If they want to know where they can search for helpful information, send them to [www.thecoolspot.gov](http://www.thecoolspot.gov) for tips and guidance on how to resist peer pressure.

###