

UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNDERAGE DRINKING

Over the last several decades, scientific understanding and knowledge of the dangers of underage drinking have increased substantially. Underage drinking is associated with various negative consequences for children and can affect and endanger the lives of those around them.¹

Children who drink alcohol are more likely to:

Use drugs

Frequent binge drinkers (nearly 1 million high school students nationwide) are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, including using other drugs such as marijuana and cocaine.²

Get bad grades

Children who use alcohol have higher rates of academic problems and poor school performance compared with nondrinkers.³

Suffer injury or death

In 2009, an estimated 1,844 homicides; 949,400 nonfatal violent crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault; and 1,811,300 property crimes, including burglary, larceny, and car theft were attributed to underage drinking.⁴

Engage in risky sexual activity

Young people who use alcohol are more likely to be sexually active at earlier ages, to have sexual intercourse more often, and to have unprotected sex.^{5, 6}

Make bad decisions

Drinking lowers inhibitions and increases the chances that children will engage in risky behavior or do something that they will regret when they are sober.^{7, 8}

Have health problems

Young people who drink are more likely to have health issues such as depression and anxiety disorders.⁹

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WHY YOU SHOULD TALK WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT ALCOHOL

The Chance That Children Will Use Alcohol Increases as They Get Older.

About 10 percent of 12-year-olds say they have tried alcohol, but by age 15, that number jumps to 50 percent. The sooner you talk to your children about alcohol, the greater chance you have of influencing their decisions about drinking.¹

Parents Play a Critical Role in Children's Decisions to Experiment With Alcohol.

Studies have shown that parents have a significant influence on young people's decisions about alcohol consumption,² especially when parents create supportive and nurturing environments in which their children can make their own decisions.³ In fact, around 80 percent of children feel that parents *should* have a say in whether they drink alcohol.^{4, 5}

The Conversation Is Often More Effective Before Children Start Drinking.

If you talk to your kids directly and honestly, they are more likely to respect your rules and advice about alcohol use. When parents know about underage alcohol use, they can protect their children from many of the high-risk behaviors associated with it.

Some Children May Try Alcohol as Early as 9 Years Old.

Most 6-year-olds know that alcohol is only for adults. Between the ages of 9 and 13, children start to view alcohol more positively. Many children begin to think underage drinking is OK. Some even start to experiment. It is never too early to talk to your children about alcohol.⁶

If You Do Not Talk About It, You Are Still Saying Something.

What you say to your children about alcohol is up to you. But remember, parents who do not discourage underage drinking may have an indirect influence on their children's alcohol use.⁷

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WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT YOUR CHILD FROM DRINKING ALCOHOL¹

Be Aware of Factors That May Increase the Risk of a Child's Alcohol Use, Including:

- » Significant social transitions such as graduating to middle or high school or getting a driver's license;
- » A history of social and emotional problems;
- » Depression and other serious emotional problems;
- » A family history of alcoholism; and
- » Contact with peers involved in troubling activities.

Be a Positive Adult Role Model.

- » Stay away from alcohol in high-risk situations. For example, do not operate a vehicle after drinking alcohol.
- » Get help if you think you have an alcohol-related problem.
- » Do not give alcohol to your children. Tell them that any alcohol in your home is off limits to them and to their friends.

Work With Schools, Communities, and the Government to Protect Children From Underage Alcohol Use by Ensuring That:

- » Schools and the community support and reward young people's decisions not to drink;
- » Schools and the community identify and intervene with children engaged in underage drinking early;
- » Rules about underage drinking are in place at home, at school, and in your community;

- » Agreements of acceptable behavior are established, well-known, and applied consistently; and
- » Parties and social events at home and elsewhere do not permit underage drinking.

Support Your Children and Give Them Space to Grow.

- » Be involved in your children's lives.
- » Encourage your children's growing independence, but set appropriate limits.
- » Make it easy for your children to share information about their lives.
- » Know where your children are, what they are doing, whom they are with, and whom they are friends with.
- » Make an effort to get to know the parents of your children's friends. Share your rules about not allowing alcohol use.
- » Find ways for your children to be involved in family life such as doing chores or caring for a younger sibling.
- » Set clear rules, including rules about alcohol use. Enforce the rules you set.
- » Help your children find ways to have fun without alcohol.
- » Do not let your children attend parties at which alcohol is served. Do not allow alcohol at parties in your own home.
- » Help your children avoid dangerous situations such as riding in a car driven by someone who has been drinking.
- » Help your children get professional help if you are worried about their involvement with alcohol.
- » Create a pledge between yourself and your children that promises they will not drink alcohol.

References

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Additional Resources:

Talk They Hear You

<https://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking>

Stay In The Know

<https://stayintheknow.org/parents>

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids

<https://drugfree.org/>

Frederick County Health Department Behavioral Health Services

<http://health.frederickcountymd.gov/131/Behavioral-Health-Services>