Talking With Tweens and Teens About Underage Drinking

A Parents' Guide to Healthy, Honest Conversation

bstrongtogether.org

Why It's Important to Talk About

- **Your Influence Matters.** Teens are **50% less likely** to use alcohol if they hear clear, consistent messages from their parents. Starting conversations early helps set those clear expectations and strengthens trust.
- **Support Brain Growth.** The brain keeps developing until age 25 — alcohol can interfere with memory, judgment, and learning.
- **Prevent Risky Behavior.** Early drinking is linked to car crashes, violence, and risky decision-making.
- **Stay Ahead of Peer Pressure.** Kids who know the risks are better equipped to make smart decisions.
- **They Are Listening.** Even if it feels awkward, your influence matters — and early talks can prevent risky behavior later.

The Dangers and Consequences of Underage Drinking

- **Health Risks.** Alcohol affects brain development, memory, learning and decision-making in young people and early drinking increases the risk of future substance abuse problems.
- **Impact on Mental Health.** Underage drinking can increase anxiety, depression, and emotional struggles.
- **Safety Risks.** Drinking increases the risk of accidents, injuries, violence, and risky sexual behavior.
- **Legal Consequences.** Underage drinking can lead to fines, community service, loss of driving privileges, and school disciplinary actions.
- **Impact on Future Goals.** Alcohol use is tied to lower grades and school problems. Getting caught drinking underage can affect college admissions, scholarships, and job opportunities.

How to Start the Conversation

- **Find the Right Moment.** Look for natural openings like a news story or a TV show. Pick calm moments like a car ride or a walk — rather than a formal sit-down
- **Stay Calm and Be Open and Honest.** Keep your tone non-judgmental to encourage honest discussion.
- **Share Your Values.** Clearly state your expectations, rules and reasons about not drinking before age 21.
- **Listen Without Judgment.** Encourage your child share what they know about alcohol and how they feel about underage drinking as well as their experiences. Ask questions like, "What do you think about drinking underage?" or "How do you feel when friends talk about drinking alcohol?"

Tips for Talking to Your Kids

- **Set Clear Rules.** Be specific about the rules and the consequences for breaking them.
- **Explain the Why.** Teens are more likely to respect rules when they understand the reasons behind them.
- **Model Responsible Behavior.** Your actions speak louder than words.
- **Practice Refusal Skills.** Remind them that most teens don't drink. Teach how to say no. Role-play ways they can say no confidently if offered alcohol.
- **Keep the Conversation Going.** Make it an ongoing dialogue, not a one-time talk.
- **Create an "Out" Plan.** Agree that they can call or text you for a ride without punishment if they find themselves in a risky situation.

★ REMEMBER ★

You are the biggest influence on your child's choice about alcohol and other drugs — even if it doesn't always seem that way. Talking early, often and honestly can make all the difference.

Helpful Resources for Parents and Teens

- SAMHSA's "Talk. They Hear You." Campaign: www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking
- Partnership to End Addiction: www.drugfree.org
- BStrong Together: www.bstrongtogether.org
- National Helpline (SAMHSA): 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Learn more