



## TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT ALCOHOL

### 5 CONVERSATION GOALS

Research shows that parents are the #1 reason young people decide not to drink. So, start talking to your children about alcohol before they start drinking—as early as 9 years old. Even if it doesn't seem like it, they really do hear you.



## 1 **Show you disapprove of underage drinking.**

Over 80% of young people ages 10-18 say their parents are the leading influence on their decision to drink or not drink. So they really are listening, and it's important that you send a clear and strong message.

## 2 **Show you care about your child's happiness and well-being.**

Young people are more likely to listen when they know you're on their side. Try to reinforce why you don't want your child to drink—not just because you say so, but because you want your child to be happy and safe. The conversation will go a lot better if you're working with, and not against, your child.

## 3 **Show you're a good source of information about alcohol.**

You want your child to be making informed decisions about drinking, with reliable information about its dangers. You don't want your child to be learning about alcohol from friends, the internet, or the media—you want to establish yourself as a trustworthy source of information.

## 4 **Show you're paying attention and you'll notice if your child drinks.**

You want to show you're keeping an eye on your child, because young people are more likely to drink if they think no one will notice. There are many subtle ways to do this without prying.

## 5 **Build your child's skills and strategies for avoiding underage drinking.**

Even if your child doesn't want to drink, peer pressure is a powerful thing. It could be tempting to drink just to avoid looking uncool. To prepare your child to resist peer pressure, you'll need to build skills and practice them.

**Keep it low-key.  
Don't worry, you don't have to get  
everything across in one talk.  
Many small talks are better.**



## UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

As your child becomes curious about alcohol, he or she may turn to you for answers and

### ANSWERING YOUR CHILD'S TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT ALCOHOL

advice. Use this opportunity to start an open, honest conversation about drinking. Because some questions can be difficult to answer, it is important to be prepared. The following are some common questions and answers about underage drinking.

#### **“I got invited to a party. Can I go?”**

Ask your child if an adult will be present at the party or if he or she thinks children will be drinking. Remind your child that even being at a party where there is underage drinking can get him or her into trouble. Use this time to establish or reinforce your rules about alcohol and outline the behavior you expect.

#### **“Did you drink when you were a kid?”**

Don't let your past stop you from talking to your child about underage drinking. If you drank as a teenager, be honest. Acknowledge that it was risky. Make sure to emphasize that we now know even more about the risks to children who drink underage. You could even give your child an example of a painful moment that occurred because of your underage drinking.

#### **“Why do you drink?”**

Make a distinction between alcohol use among children and among adults. Explain to your child your reasons for drinking: whether it is to enhance a meal, share good times with friends, or celebrate a special occasion. Point out that if you choose to drink, it is always in moderation. Tell your child that some people should not drink at all, including underage children.

#### **“What if my friends ask me to drink?”**

Helping your child say “no” to peer pressure is one of the most important things you can do to keep him or her alcohol-free. Work with your child to think of a way to handle this situation, whether it is simply saying, “No, I don't drink,” or saying, “I promised my mom (or dad) that I wouldn't drink.”



### **“You drink alcohol, so why can’t I?”**

Remind your child that underage drinking is against the law, and for good reason. Point out that adults are fully developed mentally and physically so they can handle drinking. Children’s minds and bodies, however, are still growing, so alcohol can have a greater effect on their judgment and health.<sup>1</sup>

### **“Why is alcohol bad for me?”**

Don’t try to scare your child about drinking or tell him or her, “You can’t handle it.” Instead, tell your child that alcohol can be bad for his or her growing brain, interferes with judgment, and can make him or her sick. Once children hear the facts and your opinions about them, it is easier for you to make rules and enforce them.

## **References**

1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking: A Guide to Action for Educators*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, 2007.



“Talk. They Hear You.” Family Agreement Form

UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

The Agreement states:

As your **mom/dad/caregiver**, I pledge to do my part in helping to keep you alcohol free. I promise to talk with you about the dangers and harmful effects of underage drinking. I pledge to create an alcohol-free environment that is fun and safe for you and your friends. I also pledge to pick you up at any time or place if you find yourself in any uncomfortable situation where underage drinking is involved.

As your **son/daughter**, I understand that alcohol can harm my body and my mind and make me say and do things I might regret. I pledge to avoid situations where my friends and peers are drinking underage, and I promise to call or text you to help remove me from those situations, if they arise.

By signing this pledge, I agree that I will engage in constructive conversations with you about the dangers of underage drinking.

By signing this pledge, I agree that I will not engage in underage drinking.

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