

## Talking to Kids About Drinking: The Do's and Don'ts

### DO:

- Set clear rules about drinking. Tell them that you don't allow drinking – and make sure they understand what will happen to them if they break those rules.
- Set a good example. If you drink, make sure you drink responsibly – don't overindulge, and never drive after drinking alcohol.
- Work on self-esteem. Most young people that drink are struggling with low self-esteem. Many have trouble fitting in with their peers. Help your child build their confidence and develop healthy ways of coping and dealing with stress.
- Encourage them to get involved with extracurricular activities, such as art, music, sports or clubs.

### DON'T:

- Don't lecture. Give kids lots of opportunities to talk and express their opinions.
- Don't assume that one talk is enough. Talk to kids frequently about the risks associated with alcohol abuse and underage drinking.
- Don't wait until you catch kids drinking to think of a punishment. Set clear rules and expectations early on, and make sure kids know exactly what will happen if they break your rules about drinking.
- Don't ignore your instincts. If you suspect that a kid is drinking, talk to them. Ask questions. Let them know you're paying attention.



## Learn More: Additional Resources

Need more information? Looking for more resources? Here are a few websites you can visit to learn more about how to keep kids and teens drug-free:

- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD):  
[www.madd.org/underage-drinking/](http://www.madd.org/underage-drinking/)
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
[www.cdc.gov/alcohol/](http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/)

# KIDS & ALCOHOL PREVENTION



*Starting a  
Conversation*

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## Starting A Conversation With Questions

If you're looking for a way to help kids and teens steer clear of drinking, one of the best things you can do is start a two-way conversation. Not sure where to start? Why not start here:

### Ask questions – and listen to what they have to say.

Kids are much less likely to tune you out if they feel like they're part of a conversation. Resist the urge to lecture. Instead, ask questions that will get them talking:

- What would you do if someone offered you alcohol?
- Have you ever tried alcohol? Have you ever wanted to try alcohol?  
Why or why not?
- Do you know any kids that drink? Where do they get their alcohol?
- Have you ever been to a party (or other social event) where people were drinking?
- Do you ever feel pressured to drink alcohol?
- Do you have any questions for me about alcohol?



## Kids, Alcohol and the Media

Movies and TV shows sometimes portray teen drinking as a rite of passage. While you can't always prevent kids from seeing portrayals of underage drinking, you can use them to kick off a discussion. Get kids talking by asking a few questions:



- Do you think this situation is realistic? Why or why not?
- Why do you think they're drinking?
- Do you think this makes drinking look fun and cool?
- Do you think these characters are good role models? Why or why not?
- What would you do if you were in that situation?
- Do you think movies/shows like this make teens want to drink?

## Social Hosting: Not a "Safe" Alternative

Some parents think that by letting kids drink at home (often called "social hosting"), they're doing the responsible thing. They believe that by giving kids a safe, supervised place to drink they're reducing the risk of alcohol-related problems.

When it comes to underage drinking, there's no such thing as "safe." Supervised or not, young people that drink are more likely to engage in risky behavior. What's more, if a kid is hurt or killed as a result of an alcohol-related accident, the adult who provided the alcohol can be held responsible. Some states even have specific laws against social hosting.

## Discuss Consequences

Make sure kids and teens know that if they drink, they're not just breaking your rules – they're breaking the law. Discuss your state's drinking age, and talk about the consequences of underage drinking:

- Probation
- Jail time
- Getting kicked out of extracurricular activities like sports, band, or clubs
- Losing their driver's license
- Trouble getting into college
- Fines
- Community service

## What if Kids are Already Drinking ?

If a kid is already experimenting with alcohol, the first thing to do is find out why. Stay calm and ask a few questions:

- Did they feel pressured to drink by friends, peers, or family members?
- Did they think they had to drink to fit in or look "cool"?
- Where did they get the alcohol?
- Is there something else going on – such as stress or depression – that made them want to drink?

Once you've figured out why they started drinking, help them come up with other ways to deal with peer pressure, stress, or other issues. Revisit your rules about drinking, and encourage them to come to you if they have questions or problems – or if they just need a little extra encouragement. Most importantly, keep talking: Kids and teens who feel that they can talk to a trusted adult are less likely to drink.

## Refusal Skills: Saying "No"

Discuss situations, such as parties or other social events, where they might feel extra pressure to drink alcohol -- and then help them come up with a few good ways to say "no." Help them come up with a few lines, such as:

- "Drinking makes me feel sick. Can I have a soda instead?"
- "No thanks. I'm good right now."
- "My parents will ground me for life if they smell that stuff on me."
- "Sorry. I'm driving tonight."
- "You know that's illegal, right?"
- "I don't drink."
- "I don't like the taste of alcohol!"

Remind them that a simple "no" works fine, too – they don't owe anybody an explanation.

