

MAKING THE TALK COUNT AT EVERY AGE

As with all things with kids, one size does not fit all, this is especially true when talking with them about alcohol, your concerns and expectations. What you say to a 9-year-old about alcohol is different from what you say to a 15-year-old.

A clear no-use message is the most effective way for parents to help keep their kids safe from the many dangers associated with underage alcohol use. REMEMBER Children also can't learn all they need to know from a single discussion- lots of little talks are more effective than one "big talk." Here are some tips to help!

Preschool

It may seem premature to talk about drugs but by preschool, most children have seen adults drinking alcohol, either in real life, on TV, or online. The attitudes they form at this age have an important impact on the decisions they will make when they are older. At this early age, they are eager to know and memorize rules, and they want your opinion on what's "bad" and what's "good."

Ages 5 to 8

Children this age have an increasing interest in the world outside the family and home. Now is the best time to begin to explain what alcohol is, that some people drink it even though it can be harmful, and the consequences of them drinking it. If you and your child see someone who is drunk on TV or on the street, explain that getting drunk is never good and could be dangerous.

Ages 10 to 12

During the tween and preteen years, kids will assert their independence and question authority, but they need your input and advice more than ever. In fact, when it comes to discussing alcohol and drugs, this is one of the most important times in their life.

Tweens understand the reason for rules and appreciate having limits in place- be sure they know your rules about alcohol use and the consequences if they break these rules.

Talk out some real-life situations and brainstorm solutions for what they can say. For instance: "My mom (or dad) would kill me if I drank alcohol". Be sure your tween knows that they should not continue friendships with kids who have offered them alcohol or other drugs.

Base alcohol-related messages on facts -- not fear. Tweens love to learn facts about all kinds of things. You can take advantage of their passion for learning to reinforce your message about alcohol and drugs.

REMEMBER this is a tough time for your tweens-puberty can erode your child's self-confidence and cause them to feel insecure, doubtful, and vulnerable to peer pressure. During these years, give your tween lots of positive reinforcement and praise them for their efforts and successes.

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Ages 13 to 18

Your teen will most likely know other kids who use alcohol or drugs. Most teens are still willing to express their thoughts or concerns with parents about it. Use these conversations not only to understand your teen's thoughts and feelings, but also to talk about the dangers of alcohol such as violence, sex and driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Talk about the legal issues and the possibility that they or someone else might be killed or seriously injured.

Abstinence is important and underage drinking should not be considered a "rite of passage" or something "they're going to do anyway"

Teenagers tend to be idealistic and want to help make the world a better place. Tell your teens that underage drinking is not a victimless crime, and the effect it has on our society.

Make it clear that drinking is not permitted under any circumstances and let your teen know that you trust them not to drink alcohol.

Help your child build self-reliance by asking him how he plans to deal with situations such as being offered alcohol or being invited to ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking.

Wait for your teen to return from being out with friends so you can chat about what happened. Strive to convey love and concern not mistrust.

The first time you have evidence that your teen has been drinking, confront them. Don't minimize it.

Ages 18 and older

College-age students will encounter drinking on- and off campus. Find out about a college's record of drinking-related incidents and its alcohol policy before your child enrolls. Talk about your findings with your child.

Remind your child about the dangers of binge drinking and alcohol poisoning.

As always, stay connected with your child to learn how best to help him or her.

Get more information about your college aged conversations in our parent toolkit!

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