



# Pointers For Parents

## Help Your Kid Say No To Underage Drinking

(NAPSA)—How do you prepare your child with the knowledge, skills and confidence to say no to alcohol? The task can seem challenging, but you as a parent or caregiver do not have to feel powerless. You can take action to help your child make healthy decisions that prevent underage drinking.

While the rates are declining, alcohol is the most widely misused substance among America's youth and underage drinking remains a serious concern in the U.S. The 2016 Report to Congress on the Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking finds that youth start drinking at an early age. Although the peak years of underage drinking happen from 7th to 11th grade, 10 percent of 9- to 10-year-olds have already started drinking and nearly one-fifth of underage drinkers begin before age 13.

The report also finds that any alcohol use can have serious consequences for young people. It contributes to risky sexual behavior and increases the risk of suicide and using other drugs. It can negatively impact brain development, which can have lifelong effects. It can increase the risk for heavy drinking later in life. And underage drinking can result in arrest or, worse yet, death from drunk driving or alcohol poisoning.

So what's behind this issue? There are many reasons young people are tempted to drink, including peer pressure. Underage drinking typically happens in a group, and for adolescents the desire to fit in is powerful. Other risk factors include having a history of social and emotional problems, such as depression, and a family history of substance abuse. Trying to cope with difficult life transitions, such as divorce in the family or moving from middle to high school, can also trigger underage drinking.

The first-ever Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health shows how parents are a leading influence in a child's decision about whether to drink.



**Spending time with your children can prevent underage drinking.**

### How Parents Can Help

**1. Be a positive role model.** Children learn from observing and that starts at home. Don't let your child see you misuse alcohol or drugs, and get help if you think you have a substance use problem. Even if you have misused drugs or alcohol in the past, you can still have an open conversation about their dangers and the reasons to stay away from them. In addition, keep temptation away by safeguarding alcohol and medications at home so they are not accessible to your child.

**2. Strengthen family bonds.** Be involved in your child's life and spend more time together. Show interest in your child's activities and plan ones you can do together based on their interests, such as attending sports games or having family movie or game nights. Know your child's daily routine in and out. Get to know your child's friends and friends' parents, so you can share your rules about not allowing any form of alcohol or substance use.

**3. Encourage your child to get involved in extracurricular activities.** In the same way, support your child's involvement in school clubs, such as debate or yearbook, team sports or other outside interests. Doing so will help build your child's confidence, respect, leadership, sportsmanship and ability to work with others. Also, keeping your child engaged in positive

activities helps avoid the chance that idle time is filled with potentially dangerous behavior.

**4. Balance your child's independence with safe boundaries.** Provide daily encouragement to your child to boost self-esteem and confidence. Find ways for your child to have more responsibility in family life, such as doing chores or caring for a younger sibling. Set clear expectations, including about alcohol and drug use. Create a pledge between you and your child that commits your child to not drink or use drugs.

**5. Talk to your children regularly about alcohol.** 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 them to be happy and safe. The conversation will go a lot better if you're working with, and not against, your child. Keep it low key. Don't worry about getting everything across in one talk. Many small talks are better.

### Help for Parents

If you are worried your child may be involved with alcohol or drugs, it's important to seek professional guidance. Your pediatrician can be a first-stop resource.

There are also many online resources to help you better understand the issue of underage drinking and talk to and encourage your kid to stay away from alcohol. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has underage drinking prevention resources specifically for parents and caregivers at [www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking](http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking). This includes access to SAMHSA's free app for parents called "Talk. They Hear You" to help prepare you to talk to your kid about underage drinking through practice drills.

By being proactive and following the suggestions described here, you can help strengthen your child's resistance to alcohol. Take the first step by making the commitment to talk together today.