



Start The Conversation Early: Tips On Kids And Alcohol

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(NAPSA)—Talking to your kids about alcohol may feel like a daunting task, but doing so can help prevent future health challenges and risks. It's important to broach the topic early: Many kids have their first drink as young as 9 years old, and 50 percent of 15-year-olds have tried alcohol. Young people often begin drinking alcohol after experiencing stress, peer pressure, and difficult life transitions such as moving or divorce. While many adolescents consider drinking to be a rite of passage, the reality is drinking poses a serious threat to a young person's growing brain, development and overall health. By having several small, low-key conversations with your kids about alcohol, you can create a comfortable and open space for them to discuss the dangers of underage drinking and strategies for avoiding it, without feeling awkward.

Studies show that parents have a significant effect on young people's decisions about alcohol consumption, especially when they create supportive and nurturing environments in which their children can make their own decisions. And since so many kids begin to use alcohol at a young age, the sooner you begin talking to your children about drinking, the better. "Parents are the number one influencers on a young person. If every parent communicated a strong message about underage drinking, we would already have a delay on the onset of alcohol use," said Frances Harding, Director of SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

Teen alcohol consumption is a significant public health challenge nationwide. Nearly 23 percent of people between the ages of 12 and 20 are current alcohol users, according to the most recent National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) report, published annually by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This age group consumes alcohol more than any other substance, including tobacco and other drugs. While teens tend to drink less frequently than adults, they drink larger quantities, often having five or more drinks during a single occasion. According to



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Casual conversations with your kids about drinking when they're young can help prevent underage drinking.

NSDUH, over 5 million adolescents binge drink, while 1.3 million are heavy consumers of alcohol.

This trend in underage drinking comes with significant risks. Adolescents who use alcohol are more prone to have legal issues and participate in unsafe sexual behaviors. They are more likely to have memory problems and changes in brain development that cause lifelong effects. They are also at increased risk for using other drugs, hurting themselves or someone else, and being dependent on heavy drinking later in life. There's a fatal risk, too: Underage drinking is responsible for approximately 5,000 teen deaths per year—mostly from vehicle crashes, but also from alcohol poisoning and other accidents.

You can help your children prevent these problems by talking to them early, and on a consistent basis, about the dangers of underage drinking. Continuing the conversation throughout adolescence, when the pressure to try alcohol increases, is also important. SAMHSA's "Talk. They Hear You" campaign provides support and tips for parents preparing to have these small but important talks. Helpful resources and advice can be found on the campaign's website, www.samhsa.gov/underagedrinking, including the downloadable "Talk. They Hear You" app—a tool that illustrates the dos and don'ts of talking to kids about alcohol use.

"Underage drinking is a preventable problem, and parents play a critical role in helping to save kids' lives," said Harding. "We want to help parents talk to their children about this issue."

Additional information on underage drinking, as well as substance abuse, mental health, and wellness, can be found at www.samhsa.gov.

5 Conversation Goals for Talking to Kids about Alcohol:

1. Show you disapprove of underage drinking.
2. Show you care about your child's happiness and wellbeing.
3. Show you're a good source of information about alcohol.
4. Show you're paying attention and you'll notice if your child drinks.
5. Build your child's skills and strategies to avoid underage drinking.

Keep it low key. You don't have to get everything across in one talk.

Many small talks are better.

For more tips and resources, visit www.samhsa.gov/underagedrinking.