



Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

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## Know! To Stand Firm Against Underage Drinking

In the previous tip, [Know! April is Alcohol Awareness Month](#), we discussed the negative health and safety risks of adolescents consuming alcohol. In this tip, we will talk about the prevalence of alcohol among adolescents and the steps we can take to protect our children by helping to prevent underage drinking and promote well-being.

**Did you know?** By the age of 15, about one in three teens will have had at least one alcoholic drink. By 18, more than half of all teens will have experimented with alcohol.

**It's a fact.** Underage youth between 12 to 20-years-old are responsible for drinking 11% of all the alcohol consumed in our country. Though this age group drinks less often than adults overall, they tend to drink in much higher quantities, known as binge drinking. In fact, 90% of their alcohol is consumed in this manner.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that alcohol contributes to 4,358 deaths of young people each year and more than 189,000 emergency room visits. The time to take action is now!

Preventing underage drinking is no easy task, as there are many factors unique to each individual to consider, including genetics, personality, rate of maturation and development, level of risk, and social and environmental factors.

**There are key pieces to prevention overall however, which include:**

1. *Young people need to feel loved, valued and appreciated - through words and actions – at home, at school, and within their community.* At home, it is our job to hug our kids (no matter how big they are), and tell them we love them every day.
2. *Communication is KEY – Open, honest communication.* Children whose parents talk with them early and often about the dangers of substance use – including alcohol and underage drinking – are up to 50% less likely to use in the first place. Talk about the big stuff, talk about the small stuff – talk about the negative consequences of alcohol (refer to



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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

Know! encourages you to share this Parent Tip with friends and family.

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- the previous Know! Tip for info), and just talk about what is happening in their everyday lives.
3. *Expectations – Our children have to know what is expected of them.* We have to set clear boundaries when it comes to alcohol. Our children need to hear us say that underage drinking is unacceptable. In surveys where youth reported NOT drinking underage – they cited not wanting to disappoint their parents. But they have to know where we stand. And we have to stand against it, or they are much more likely to partake.
  4. *Trust – They have to be able to trust us and know that no matter what’s happening, we are there for them and will help them through whatever situation they find themselves in.* This can be tricky because if they do find themselves in a sticky situation and they do come to us, we must remain calm or that trust is broken, and they will not come to us next time. Does it mean that there aren’t consequences? Of course not. Trust also includes them knowing the consequences for breaking the rules and trusting that we will follow through and hold them accountable for the choices they have made.
  5. *Positive Role Models are vital – Parents are a child’s first and most important role model. Believe it or not, our teens pay close attention to what we say and do and how we handle ourselves in different situations.* On the other hand, research shows that parents who binge drink are much more likely to have children who binge drink. Be careful of the example you’re setting for your child.
  6. *Friends Matter.* We must know with whom our children are spending their time. We must also get to know our children’s friends and their parents – which becomes trickier the older they become.
  7. *Activity Connections – Be it a sport, band, theater, chess club, whatever – we should be encouraging our kids to find their passion and get connected.* For the times when a simple “no,” doesn’t feel like enough, their connections give them an ideal way to turn down a drink when offered: “No thanks - coach would kill me,” or “No thanks – I’ve got my play coming up and I can’t risk it.”

Prevention Action Alliance  
6171 Huntley Road, Suite G  
Columbus, Ohio 43229  
PH: (614) 540-9985  
FX: (614) 540-9990

Alcohol remains our nation’s number one health problem, for youth and adults. The time to take action to protect our children from underage drinking and set them up to succeed in life is now. By following the steps above, you’ll start to take action to improve outcomes for the children in your life.

April is Alcohol Awareness Month. For more information and guidance on prevention, please visit <https://www.ncadd.org/about-ncadd/events-awards/alcohol-awareness-month>

Sources: [Centers for Disease Control: Alcohol and Public Health – Underage Drinking. Oct. 20, 2016.](#) [National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence \(NCADD\): Alcohol Awareness Month 2018.](#) [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\): Alcohol Facts and Statistics 2017.](#)