



The best time to talk to your teen about alcohol is before they start.

Underage drinking, defined as anyone under age 21 consuming alcohol, is a significant public health problem.

A common misperception is that teen alcohol use is “normal” for that age group. This misperception does not take into account that the teenage brain physiologically varies from adults. Consequently, alcohol use during the teen years creates the foundation for increased risk for immediate and lasting harm. These harms can include changes in school performance, motor vehicle accidents, procurement of sexually transmitted diseases, physical violence, increased risk of suicide, legal problems, and addiction.*

Research suggests that there are a multitude of reasons that increase the likelihood of teens alcohol use. However strong these reasons may be, it is important to remember that parents have the most influence on their teen’s decision to use alcohol before teens begin to use.

The following are common signs of teen alcohol use: mood changes, school problems, acquiring a “nothing matters” attitude, physical concerns (lack of coordination, slurred speech), and rebelling against family rules.* It is important to remember that these signs can be challenging to identify, as some are common with developing teens. Therefore, it is important to talk to your teens using the guidance provided in this toolkit.

Under The Influence Of Advertising

Evidence from long-term studies show that the more often teens are exposed to alcohol marketing, the greater the likelihood that they will start drinking – or if already drinking – that they will drink more (for every alcohol ad viewed, teens were shown to drink 1% more).



Now That You Know, Where Do You Start?

Learning these facts is important. But it’s just as crucial to create a plan for an open dialogue and to be mindful of engaging your teen with respect. Positive role modeling, compassion and the truth will go a long way to help you start acting.

Use the following steps and resources to start your own Communication Action Plan. 



Fast Facts

- Parents have the greatest influence on their teen’s decision to use alcohol.
- Teens who drink are more likely to encounter violent crime, serious school-related problems, and alcohol-related traffic accidents.
- The 2021 Pennsylvania Youth Survey for Montgomery County showed that high school youth:
 - Felt it would be “sort of easy” or “very easy” to get beer, wine, or hard liquor:
 - 8th graders: **29.9%**
 - 10th graders: **47.2%**
 - 12th graders: **56.4%**

Those who used alcohol in the past 12 months, stated that “My parent provided it to me”:

- 8th graders: **39.8%**
- 10th graders: **28.5%**
- 12th graders: **32.5%**

Start Here:

1 Before You Talk: Be Ready to Listen.

A conversation is a two-way street. Mutual respect, transparency, compassion and hearing what your teen says will go a long way toward giving your facts and position more clout. Your teen started thinking about or using alcohol for a reason. Start there. **IMPORTANT:** No one resource, or document is a magic bullet. Assemble all the available tools at your disposal into your playbook. Start with the great resources offered at the PA Liquor Control Board (PLCB) website: **Know When. Know How**

2 The Conversation: Look for Your Moment.

There is no “one size fits all” time or way to initiate a conversation like this. Your teens’ reactions are likely to be affected in part by their age and maturity level. The best results come from collaboration. Watch for the right lead-in. Avoid confrontational tendencies. Having patience and empathy will build trust. The Partnership to End Addiction breaks down the steps to have an effective conversation in this Intervention e-book: **What To Do If Your Child Is Drinking Or Using Drugs**

3 You’ve Gotten Their Attention: Now What?

Your teen may be using or contemplating using alcohol for a variety of reasons. Find out what he or she thinks they know about alcohol. Chances are they are unaware of the vast potential harm. Provide answers to their questions and dispel myths. Appeal to their good judgment. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration offers a question-and-answer information sheet that can facilitate a factual and healthy discussion related to alcohol. **Answering Your Child’s Tough Questions**

4 Great Start: Don’t Stop!

All these pieces can help to formulate a communication plan for you and your teen, but alcohol can be addictive. Research suggests that teens that begin drinking before age 15 have a 41% chance of struggling with alcohol dependence later in life. One talk is probably not going to be enough. Your teen is going to need ongoing support to help them quit. Keep the lines of communication open and the conversation alive. Discover resources together and encourage them to be part of the process. One resource available to help your teen feel empowered to quit is the **Substance Abuse And Mental Health Services National Helpline**



Tips For Success

- Be empathetic.
- Try to recall what it was like to be a teen.
- Ask questions.
- Be an attentive listener.
- Employ Positive Parenting techniques.
- Avoid criticism.
- Commit to patience.
- Share facts and resources.
- Answer questions.
- Remind and repeat.

Regardless of all the resources that alcohol companies pour into their marketing and lobbying efforts, the truth is out there and available. All these tools and more are available on **PAStart.org/Alcohol**. Use our collection of links and materials to create a strategy that will engage and empower you and your teen. They’re all designed to help you get started.



For more Montgomery County information and resources, scan the QR code above or visit the Cheltenham Communities That Care website.



Cheltenham

Communities That Care

cheltenhamcommunitiesthatcare.org/start-by-connecting

Learn More.

PAStart

CPA Commonwealth Prevention Alliance

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