

HELPFUL RESOURCES



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CREATE AN EXIT PLAN

Does your teen have an "exit plan" if they're offered or faced with a difficult decision about alcohol or other drugs? Peer pressure can be powerful among teens, and having a plan in place to avoid substance use can help your kids make good choices. Discuss what they can do in difficult situations, such as texting a code word to a family member. Be sure to practice the exit plan in a safe environment so that they feel more comfortable and confident with it.

Research suggests that one of the most influential factors when a teen is growing up is a strong, open relationship with a parent or caregiver.

For more information on how to talk with your teen about underage drinking and other drug use, visit talktheyhearyou.samhsa.gov and www.samhsa.gov.

To download and order "Talk. They Hear You." campaign materials online from the SAMHSA Store, visit www.store.samhsa.gov.



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SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN ABOUT ALCOHOL:

Keeping Your Kids Safe



GET INFORMED

Is alcohol addictive? The short answer is “yes.” Alcohol, like other drugs, has a powerful effect on the brain, producing both positive and negative feelings. These feelings can motivate some people to drink alcohol repeatedly, despite risks to their health and wellbeing. When people with an alcohol use disorder (AUD) stop drinking, they experience withdrawal symptoms—or symptoms that are opposite to the pleasurable feelings that may be experienced when drinking alcohol. These symptoms can be physical (sleep disturbances, pain, feelings of illness) and emotional (sadness, irritability, anxiety, and emotional pain).

Young people are especially at risk for developing an AUD. Drinking alcohol during adolescence may affect brain development, making it more likely that users will be diagnosed with an AUD later in life. Teens who drink usually start with beer, wine, or flavored malt alcohol, a sweet-tasting blend of alcohol and carbonated fruit juice. Although many teenagers mistakenly believe that these drinks are “safer” than hard liquor, it’s the amount of alcohol you drink, not what you drink, that matters.

The impact of alcohol on teens:

- Frequent binge drinkers are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, including using other drugs such as marijuana and cocaine.
- Drinking alcohol lowers inhibitions and increases the likelihood that kids will engage in risky behaviors or do something that they’ll regret when they’re sober, including driving after drinking or riding with someone who has been drinking.
- Young people who drink alcohol are more likely to have mental health issues such as depression and anxiety disorders.

BE PREPARED

The following signs may indicate your teen has a problem with alcohol or other drugs, but some also reflect normal growing pains. Experts believe that a drinking or drug use problem is more likely if you notice several of these signs at the same time, if they occur suddenly, or if some of them are extreme in nature.

- Mood changes: flare-ups of temper, irritability, or defensiveness
- School problems: poor attendance, low grades, or recent disciplinary action
- Rebellion against family rules
- Friend changes: switching friends and a reluctance to let you get to know new friends
- A “nothing matters” attitude: sloppy appearance, a lack of involvement in former interests, or general low energy
- Presence of alcohol or other drugs: finding it in their room or backpack, smelling it on their breath, or noticing new use of potential cover-ups like perfume/cologne, mouthwash, or mints/gum
- Physical or mental problems: memory lapses, poor concentration, bloodshot eyes, lack of coordination, or slurred speech



TAKE ACTION

Talking with your teen early and often about the risks and dangers of drinking alcohol and using other drugs is the first step toward keeping them substance-free. But as they enter middle school and high school, the pressure to try alcohol and other drugs increases. Teens are more likely to avoid substance use when they have a strong, trusting relationship with their parents or caregivers. It’s important to continue these conversations as your teen’s experiences and needs change throughout adolescence and young adulthood.

Use these tips:

- Remind them that their brain is still developing, which is why alcohol and other drugs are especially harmful for anyone under the age of 21.
- Use everyday opportunities to talk with them—in the car, during dinner, or while watching TV.
- Let them know you’re always there for them.
- Encourage them to get involved in sports and other extracurricular activities.
- Help boost their confidence by teaching them different ways to say “no” to alcohol and other drugs and reminding them that real friends won’t pressure them to use substances.
- Reassure them that things will get easier, and reinforce that alcohol and other drugs aren’t a solution.
- Consider using a written or verbal agreement that outlines your expectations and family rules about alcohol and other drugs.