

POWER OF PARENTS®

TOPICAL GUIDE #4

Helping Your Child Make Good Choices





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How To Use This Topical Guide

Underage drinking and cannabis use poses a special risk to young people. It's illegal and dangerous. This topical guide urges parents to:

TALK EARLY AND OFTEN

Use strategies recommended to talk with your child about alcohol and cannabis, even if it does not seem like they are interested in them.

SET A FAMILY RULE

of no alcohol or cannabis use before age 21.

AGREE ON CONSEQUENCES

for breaking the no-use rule; enforce "zero tolerance."

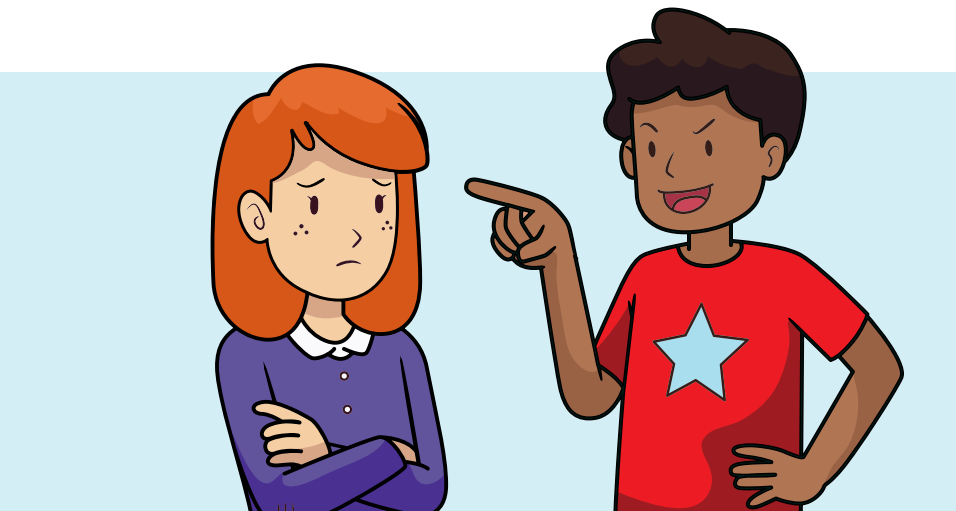
This is the fourth in a series of topical guides. Read the other topical guides and download MADD's full parent handbook at madd.org/powerofparents.



Acknowledgments

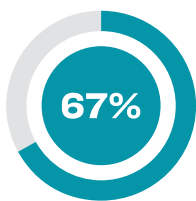
Mothers Against Drunk Driving® is grateful to Robert Turrisi, Ph.D., and his colleagues at The Pennsylvania State University for their partnership in this resource. Dr. Turrisi has spent decades researching how parents can talk effectively with teens about alcohol and cannabis. This resource draws from his work and from scientific knowledge in this field from all over the world.

Nationwide Insurance is the proud National Presenting Sponsor of *Power of Parents*. "As a company committed to protecting people, businesses, and futures with extraordinary care, there is no more important work that aligns with our values than keeping our roadways, families, and communities safe. Thank you for your commitment to preventing underage substance use and impaired driving. Nationwide is proud to stand with you on this lifesaving mission."



Dealing With Peer Pressure

Many teens choose to drink because they assume everyone else is doing it and that it's an acceptable thing to do. However, studies show that 67% of teens are NOT drinking alcohol.



67% of
teens are
not drinking
alcohol.

You can't completely protect your child from peer pressure,

but by teaching your teen to make good choices and by supervising and monitoring their activities, you can help shield your teen from the most dangerous situations.

Sometimes teens face situations where they are pressured to do something they would rather not do. For example, a friend might push your teen to have a drink when they don't want to. You can empower your child by talking to them about ways they can say no without feeling weird or left out.

WAYS TO SAY NO

**Your child
might be told:**

**Refusal
Strategy:**

**Your child
could say:**

“Come on, everyone
has tried it.”

ACTIVE
Take a stand

“No, I don’t do
drugs.”

“If you won’t drink
with us, then why
are you hanging out
with us?”

PASSIVE
Make an excuse

“Sorry, I just have
an early game
tomorrow morning
and need to be
ready.”

“We drank once
before, so what’s
the problem now?”

ACTIVE
Make a statement

“I know, and I’m
not making that
mistake again.”

“Come on, are you
scared?”

PASSIVE
Suggest an
alternative

“No, but you’re
going to be scared
when we watch
that new scary
movie I was telling
you about!”

“It’s the perfect
chance with your
parents out of
town! It’s now or
never.”

PASSIVE
Change the subject

“Oh my gosh that
reminds me—if I
don’t water the
plants my mom will
be so mad! I have
to go.”

Connecting With Your Child

Your connection is one of the strongest protective factors your child has. Research shows that the more engaged and involved you are in your teen's life, the less likely they are to misuse alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs. In fact, according to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 2021, teens whose parents consistently know where they are and who they're with are substantially less likely to report using any substance.



You don't need grand gestures to build a connection. Simple, everyday interactions go a long way:

- Cook dinner together
 - Talk about their day (and yours!)
 - Spend time doing activities you both enjoy
 - Express interest in their world
-

***When you talk,
it is important
that you keep
three things
in mind:***

Teens who have high self-esteem are better equipped to make smart choices, deal with peer pressure, and avoid underage drinking.

Boost your teen's self-esteem by:

- Praising achievements
- Helping set realistic goals
- Giving choices
- Offering responsibilities
- Focusing on teen's strengths

1

Ask questions like “how,” “ why,” and “what” instead of giving lectures. This helps your teen feel heard, not judged.

2

Stay calm, even if you hear something you don't like. Your reaction shapes whether they'll keep talking in the future.

3

Keep the conversation going. Even if it's awkward or uncomfortable at first, your child needs your guidance and your presence in this part of their life.

Good Problem Solving

Helping your teen develop strong problem-solving skills is a critical part in preparing them for the challenges they will face in the future. By coaching your teen through the following theoretical scenario, your teen will be more confident in making healthy, informed decisions when the time comes that they must make decisions on their own.



**Start with
a scenario:
Your teen is
invited to a
party where
alcohol might
be present.**

Step 1

**Notice
the Problem**



Step 2

**Identify
Possible Actions**



Step 3

**Gather
Information**



Step 4

**Examine
and Decide**



Step 5

**Follow
Through**



What's the situation?

What are the potential risks?

Go along with it.

Try to talk their friends out of it.

Call you to come home.

What are the risks of underage drinking?

How might they feel if their friends pressure them?

Which choice keeps them safe and aligns with their values?

What's the best way to respond while not jeopardizing their friendships?

Encourage them to follow through with their decision in the real world.

Reiterate your agreement to not use alcohol or other substances.

Choosing Friends

Friendships are incredibly important during the teen years, and the people your child spends time with can strongly influence their choices. That's why it's essential to know who their friends are, encourage positive relationships, and stay involved in their social lives.

Talk with your teen about what makes a good friend. True friendship isn't about popularity or appearances, it's about mutual respect, trust, and care. A real friend wants to keep you safe, not pressure you into risky behavior.



If you're concerned about a friend's influence, avoid forbidding the friendship outright. Instead:

Invite the friend into family settings where you can model and reinforce your values.

Encourage new friendships through clubs, sports, or hobbies.

Teach your teen to avoid high-risk group situations, like unsupervised parties or group hangouts without clear plans.

Stay in the loop. Before social events, check in with the host's parents to confirm that adults will be present and substances won't be.

Finding Alternatives to Substance Use

Some teens have “positive” reasons (from their perspective) for why they might choose to drink. Help teens think of other ways to achieve similar goals.

Rather than celebrating a championship win by drinking with friends...

Invite some friends over for a celebration party!

Rather than smoking a joint to blow off steam after studying for a big test...

Practice some self-care with a spa night at home.

Rather than drinking to fit in with new friends...

Suggest another activity or find friends with similar values.



Riding With an Impaired Driver

Although impaired driving is *especially* dangerous for minors, it's important you reiterate to them that *no one* should ever drive impaired. There is no “safe” or “skilled” impaired driver and they should never ride with anyone who has had any amount of a mind-altering substance.

Research shows that even kids that don't intend to ride

with a driver who has been drinking or using substances may be “willing” in some circumstances. For example, they might be willing to get in the car if they feel responsible for helping a friend stay out of trouble or not get hurt. Someday your child may be faced with this decision and it's important to set clear family rules.

When talking about impaired driving, remember to:

Discuss the dangers of impaired driving for drivers AND passengers.

Teach them how to identify signs of impairment.

Encourage alternatives: like calling a trusted adult for a ride.

Remind them there are no shortcuts to sobering up.

Stress that they need to call 911 in an emergency.

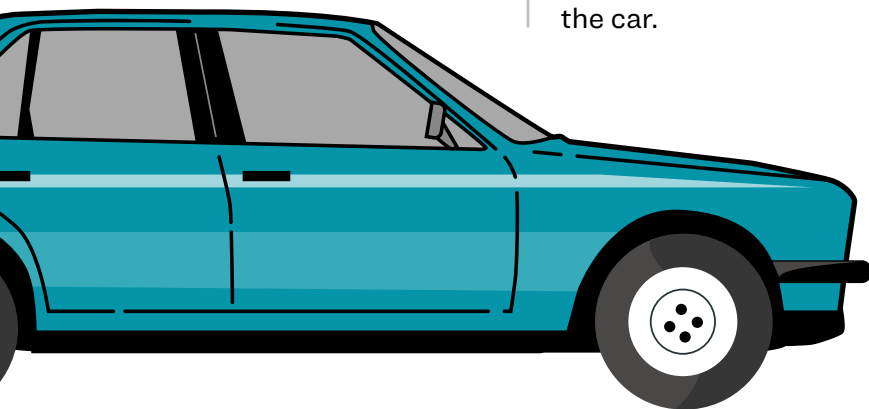
Spotting an Impaired Driver

For teens to make the decision not to get into the car with an impaired driver, they first need to know how to *identify* an impaired driver.

You may have noticed by now that we talk about the dangers of “impaired” driving, rather than just “drunk” driving. This is because, as cannabis has legalized around the country, instances of drugged driving have skyrocketed. Many people still hold the belief that driving

high is safe and acceptable. However, substances that are mind-altering greatly impact your brain’s ability to function normally. Driving is a complex task that involves a wide range of cognitive skills, multisensory perception, and motor abilities. This is why it’s dangerous, and often deadly, for *anyone* of *any* age to drive impaired.

So how can someone tell if their driver is impaired? Teach your teen to be observant of the driver *before* they get into the car.



How do they LOOK?



- Glossy eyes; bloodshot eyes; dilated pupils; can't keep eyes open
- Stumbling, can't walk straight
- Agitated energy; sweaty and alert, jittery
- Moving slowly; lethargic or drowsy

How do they SOUND?



- Slurring their words
- Talking slowly, mumbling
- Talking quickly, rushing their words
- Talking louder than usual

How do they SMELL?



- Strong, sharp smell - like alcohol
- Stinky, skunk smell - like cannabis
- Bad breath

Use a Code Word

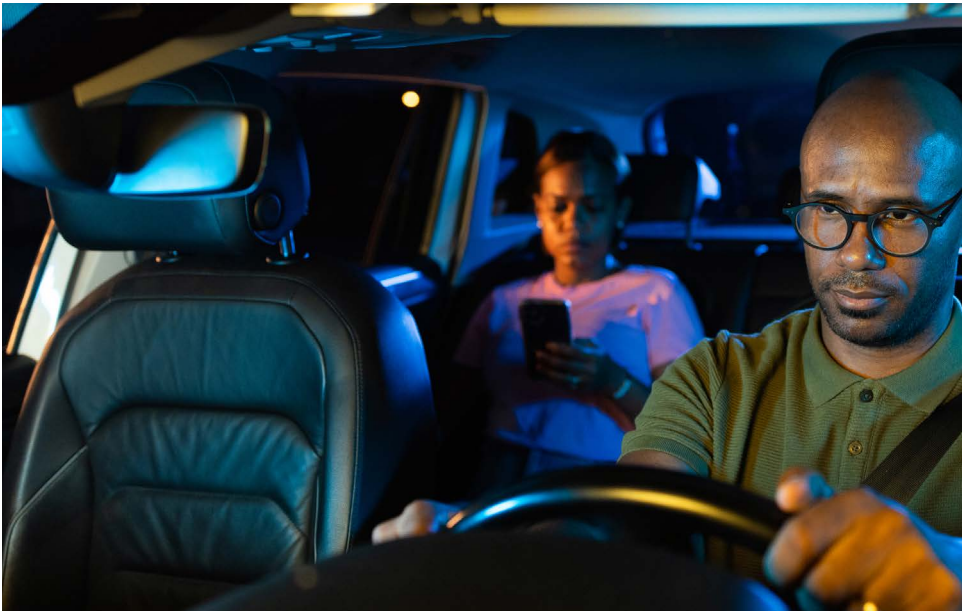
FOR SAFETY

Peer pressure is tough to resist. Help your child find an easy way out of a potentially dangerous situation by texting or calling you with a code word or phrase that will let you know they need your help.

Wrong Message

Some parents worry that offering a ride home could send the wrong message and make kids believe it's okay to drink alcohol. Even if you offer a ride home, you can still enforce previously established consequences for breaking the no-alcohol rule.

Assure your child that their safety is the #1 priority. When kids have good communication with their parents and trust that their parents won't overreact (by getting angry and setting harsh or unknown punishments), they are more likely to call home for help.



If your child calls you to pick them up because either they or someone else has been drinking:

Pick up your child and get them home safely. Don't get angry and stay calm on the way home.

If the established household rule has been broken, pick the soonest appropriate time to discuss consequences with your child. It may be best to wait until the next day.

Talk again about your family rules and enforce the agreed upon consequences. Remind them, you only want to keep them safe.



The Bottom Line

Helping your child make good choices starts long before they are faced with a tough decision.

- **Stay connected.** Teens are more likely to make good choices—and call you when it matters—if they know you'll listen.
- **Practice real-life problem-solving.** Help your teen think through scenarios before they're in the moment.
- **Talk openly and often.** Keep the conversation going about peer pressure, substance use, and safer ways to have fun.

They are choosing their path...are you showing them the way?

This series of resources can help parents substantially reduce the chance that their child will drink alcohol and use cannabis before the age of 21.

Alcohol is the substance most commonly used drug by youth—more than all other illicit substances combined. MADD's *Power of Parents* handbooks are based on the latest research by Robert Turrisi, PhD at Penn State University, which, when followed, has shown up to a 30% reduction in underage drinking. The research-based principles and materials are useful to help parents have the critical discussions about alcohol as well as cannabis and other substances with their children—from middle school through high school.



30%
reduction
in underage
drinking

By talking to children early and often, parents can prevent dangerous and deadly consequences from alcohol and other substances. These intentional, ongoing and life-changing conversations will help keep youth, families and entire communities healthy and safe.

Download MADD's full parent handbook at madd.org/powerofparents for more tips and strategies for having critical conversations with your child about alcohol and other drugs.

HALT Drunk Driving Law

As parents, we do everything we can to keep our teens safe—but right now, drunk driving remains the deadliest threat on our roads. That's why MADD is leading the charge with the HALT Drunk Driving Law—a groundbreaking law that requires advanced technology in all new cars that will detect and stop drunk drivers. The next generation of vehicles can stop drunk drivers before they ever put your teen at risk.

Join MADD in the fight to end drunk driving for good. Learn more about the HALT Law and how you can help drive change to protect your teen's future. Take action today: Visit madd.org/halt



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Preventing underage drinking requires a shared commitment, and MADD is grateful for General Motors' partnership with the *Power of Parents* program. With their support, we are equipping more families with the resources they need to have open and honest conversations about alcohol and other drugs and their risks.

MADD™ IMPAIRED DRIVING
ENDS HERE.

MADD's mission is to end drunk and drugged driving, support the victims of these violent crimes, and prevent underage drinking and other drug use.

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