



THE POWER OF CHOICE
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About This Issue

It is vital that your teens know that you are present and aware - set clear and firm guidelines about underage alcohol use.

THE PARENT POST

MIDDLE SCHOOL EDITION

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01 Monitor & Develop Family Strategies

Welcome to the Spring 2019 Issue of the Parent Post, Middle School edition. This issue we are exploring the importance of monitoring and developing family strategies to keep your teen safe from underage drinking. Early adolescence is a time of immense and often very confusing changes for your teen, which makes it a challenging time for both your child and you. Understanding what it is like to be a teen can help you stay closer to your child and have more influence on the choices that he or she makes – including decisions about not using alcohol.

Monitor – Develop Family Strategies to Keep Your Teen Safe from Underage Drinking

Develop family rules about underage drinking. When parents establish clear no alcohol rules and expectations, their children are less likely to begin drinking. Each family should develop agreements and set clear boundaries about teen alcohol use that reflect their own beliefs and values.

The Evolving Adolescent Brain - Research shows that as a child matures, his or her brain continues to develop too. The brain's final adult wiring may not even be complete until well into the twenties. The adolescent needs to take some risks necessary to achieve independence from their parent. This may help explain why teens seek out new and thrilling – sometimes dangerous – situations, including drinking alcohol. It also offers a possible reason for why young teens sometimes act impulsively. They often do not recognize that their actions like drinking can lead to serious problems.

02 Letting Them Know They Measure Up

As children approach adolescence, fitting in becomes extremely important. They begin to feel more self-conscious about their bodies than they did when they were younger and begin to wonder whether they are good enough compared to others. They look to friends and the media for clues on how they measure up. They begin to question adults' values and rules. It is not surprising that this is the time when parents often experience conflict with their kids. Respecting your child's growing independence while still providing support and setting limits is a key challenge during this time. A young teen who



feels that he or she doesn't fit in is more likely to do things to try and please friends, including experimenting with alcohol. During this vulnerable time, it is particularly important to let your kids know that in your eyes, they do measure up – and that you care about them deeply. Part of that caring is reflected in your expectation that they not use alcohol.

In partnership with



The Power of Choice is a project of 360 Youth Services, Naperville School District 203, Indian Prairie School District 204, Naperville Police Department, KidsMatter and District 203 & 204 parents.

03 ◀ Staying Involved & Monitoring your Teen

Parents need to be absolutely clear about their expectations for abstinence from alcohol and all other drugs and they need to share their love and worry about what could happen to their child, rather than threats of consequences. Rather than throw up your hands and say there's nothing you can do, take a minute to reflect on just how important and influential parents' roles are to their children.

In fact, you can make a difference. It all starts with having proactive strategies in place to ensure your teens learn to live by the family's rules and values, to appreciate that there are healthier ways to enjoy their time and that responsibility is something that needs to be practiced.

Be Involved

The best way to be in the know about what your children are doing is to be involved in their daily lives. This doesn't mean that you have to take time off from work to watch over them like a hawk, but it does mean that you engage in ongoing conversation about their likes, their friends, new activities and interests, what's bothering them, any peer pressure, struggles with skills or learning ability, and what they want to get out of summer.

The more you interact with your teens, the more natural and comfortable this way of communicating will feel. The overarching impression is that you care about your kids and want to do all that you can to ensure that their teen years are filled with beneficial opportunities to learn and grow, and to build their core sense of values and increase personal responsibility.

While this may be easy to recommend, how do you implement a strategy to be involved & monitor your teens' lives? You could try the following:

- » Ask about their plans for the day or week.
- » Discuss as a family things to do together on the weekend or plans for a family vacation.
- » Research activities together that your teen can participate in – hopefully, pertaining to his or her interests, but also encouraging them to discover new ones.
- » Learn the names and background of your teen's friends.
- » Communicate with the parents of your teen's friends and make sure they know your expectations about not allowing alcohol and drug use.
- » Set clear rules, including rules about not using alcohol and other drugs. Enforce the rules you set.
- » Know where your children are, what they are doing and whom they are with.
- » Keep a family calendar with important dates and activities clearly listed.



04 ◀ Work With the Community



Consistency of the message that alcohol and drugs are off-limits needs to be communicated. To ensure this happens, parents should work with their children's schools, with other members in the community and the local government. Here are the goals, as recommended by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

What You Can Do with the Community to Prevent Your Child from Drinking Alcohol:

Schools and the community support as well as reward young people's decision not to drink [and use drugs].

Schools and the community identify and intervene early with children involved in underage drinking [and drug use].

Make sure that rules about underage drinking [and drug use] are in place at home, in school, and in your community.

Ensure that agreements of acceptable behavior are established, well-known, and consistently applied.

No alcohol [or drugs] permitted at parties and social events at home or elsewhere where children are present.

Additional Resources for you ▶

Parenting to Prevent Childhood Alcohol Use – National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
<https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/adolescentflyer/adolflyer.htm>

Connect with The Power of Choice online and on social media:

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