



THE POWER OF CHOICE
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About This Issue

It is so important to keep talking in order to keep our teens healthy. In this issue we explore the risks of underage drinking. We also share ways we can productively communicate with our teens about not using alcohol.

THE PARENT POST

January 2020
MIDDLE SCHOOL EDITION

Look for some of our latest parent PSAs on Facebook!

Keep Talking - Keep them Healthy!

01 Welcome to the latest issue of the Parent Post, Middle School edition. In this issue we are looking at the effects and risks of underage drinking and what we can do to help prevent underage drinking. It is important for parents to be informed on these issues in order to help our teens make informed decisions. Parents who know the effects of alcohol on teens are able to better communicate to teens why they should stay away from underage alcohol use. Alcohol is the most widely used substance among America's teens and young adults, posing substantial health and safety risks. Believe it or not, the average age for a first drink is 14.

A Parent's Guide to Underage Drinking

Teens try alcohol for a variety of reasons – to exert independence, escape from stress, peer pressure, rebellion and even boredom – but they tend to do so without fully recognizing alcohol's negative effects or health risks. According to sources, Forty percent of teens do not perceive any risk in having one or two drinks nearly every day.

As parents, we hold tremendous influence over whether our child decides to drink or not. We must be informed and be clear that we disapprove of underage drinking, model healthy behavior and find opportunities to discuss the dangers of alcohol.

Know the Risks

Most underage drinking – 90 percent of it – is in the form of binge drinking. People ages 12-20 drink 11 percent of all alcohol consumed in the U.S. Although young people drink less often than adults do, when they do drink, they drink more, exponentially increasing risks to health and safety.

Drinking impairs judgment and can lead to poor decisions about engaging in risky behaviors that put one's self and others at risk. Unfortunately, each year young people are impacted as a result of underage drinking (car crashes, homicides, alcohol poisoning, falls, burns, drowning and suicides).

Other important risk factors to consider, and to help our children understand: Teen brains are more vulnerable to alcohol. Research shows that the teen brain doesn't fully develop until 25. Alcohol can alter this development, potentially affecting brain structure and function.



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Underage drinking increases the risk of alcohol problems later in life. Research shows that people who start drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to meet the criteria for alcohol dependence at some point in their lives.

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.

02 ◀ Tips for Fostering Communication

The key to building a positive relationship and sorting out any communication difficulties with our teens is to keep the channels of communication open. Keep talking, they really are listening. Keep in mind, though, that productive communication with our teens should not feel like we're giving them the third degree. Remain calm, relax and follow the tips below to ensure that our children hear what we have to say – and so that we can hear them out as well.

- » Try to be objective and open. If we want to have a productive conversation with our child, we need to keep an open mind and remain curious. Our child is more likely to be receptive this way.
- » Ask open-ended questions. These are questions that elicit more than just a “yes” or “no” response and will lead to a more engaging conversation.
- » Let our teens know they're being heard. Use active listening and reflect back what we are hearing – either verbatim, or just the sentiment. For example, we can say, I'm hearing that you feel overwhelmed, and that you think drinking helps you relax. Is that right?
- » Discuss the negative effects of alcohol, and what that means in terms of mental and physical health, safety and making healthy decisions. Talk about the short & long-term effects.
- » If a teen is interested in drinking, ask why – It will also give us insight into what's important to them. Talk about what might happen if they do drink. This gets your teen to think about their future, what their boundaries are around drinking – and some of the possible negative consequences (they may be late to practice, do something stupid in front of their friends, feel hung over or face consequences at school and home).
- » Offer empathy and compassion. Let teens know we understand. The teen years can be tough. Acknowledge that everyone struggles sometimes, but alcohol is not a useful or healthy way to cope with problems. Let teens know that they can trust us.
- » Remind our teens that we are there for support and guidance – and that it's important to us, that they are healthy and happy and makes safe choices.
- » If there is a history of addiction or alcoholism in our families, then our teen have a much greater risk of developing a problem. Be aware of this elevated risk and discuss it regularly, as we would with any disease.
- » Keep an eye on how our teens are coping. Do they seem withdrawn or uninterested in the usual activities? These are signs that teens might be hiding something, struggling or need some guidance.



03 ◀ What You Can Do



If we choose to drink, we must model responsible drinking behavior. A child with a parent who binge drinks is much more likely to binge drink than a child whose parents do not. We need to try to avoid sending any unintended messages – find ways to celebrate and relax without alcohol. Don't make alcohol available to teens or their friends. This isn't only a matter of safety, depending on where you live, it could be the law.

Kids ages 11-14 see approximately 1,000 alcohol ads a year. Discuss what is out there and help put context around the alcohol messaging teens receive from friends and the media. We must supervise any parties in our homes to make sure there is no alcohol – and make sure our teens know the rules ahead of time. Learn more about social hosting laws and what they can mean for our personal liability in the event of underage drinking in the home.

If our teens are socializing at someone else's home, we need to know where they will be. Call the parents in advance to verify the occasion and location and that there will be supervision. If the activity seems inappropriate, express concern and keep your child home.

It is important that we communicate expectations and rules for when our teens go out with friends, and include regular check-ins. Assuring our teen that they can call us to be picked up whenever needed. **For more resources and for future newsletters, please visit: www.thepowerofchoice.org**

Additional Resources for you ▶

Learn more here - Talking with your kids about not using alcohol:
www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/why-talk-about-alcohol_0.pdf

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

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