

What Parents Can Do To Prevent Underage Drinking

Know the Consequences and Teach Kids Caution about Alcohol: Students who perceive that drinking is *risky and harmful* for kids are less likely to drink. Know the consequences of underage drinking and abuse of alcohol in general. Discuss these with your kids frequently.

Kids should learn *early* to respect the danger and power of alcohol. Not just drinking and driving - but addiction, reduction of ability to learn, alcohol poisoning, and the risk of someone taking advantage of you while you are drunk and vulnerable (for example, sexual assault). As best you can - try to convey that people who have been drinking have less self control, tend to be more violent, and take risks they would never imagine they would take when sober. This is more likely to result in fights, injuries, unprotected sex, and similar risky behavior.

It is very unlikely that any of the 14,000,000 alcoholics in the US actually intended to become addicted to alcohol. Teach respect for its ability to let you believe you are in control until it is too late. Speak frankly and honestly about family members or others that have fought a battle with alcoholism. It brings reality to the warnings they have been given in school or from you; and makes the risks real.

Clear Family Rule: Underage drinking is statistically much less frequent in homes where the parents have a *clearly stated family rule*: *"I expect that you will not drink and if you do you will be in trouble - because we care about you."*

Start young and repeat the caution regularly at appropriate opportunities. To support that, do not provide sips, tastes, have kids mix the drinks, or fetch a beer. Do not involve them in the drinking process. You don't want to make the drinking process any more comfortable and familiar to them than the media already has.

Practice Parental Monitoring: There is significantly less drinking where students report high parental monitoring. This includes such parental activities as:

- Always knowing where your kids are; who they are with.
- Insuring parents are home if kids are at a friend's home.
- Always being up when your kids come in at night so they know they will face you if they have been drinking.
- Knowing your kids' friends.
- Being alert for warning signs (changes in behavior, drop in grades, depression, and of course an odor of alcohol on breath or clothes).

Reduce or eliminate alcohol around the home: The most common source of alcohol for the first few times a kid drinks is to take it from their home or the home of a friend.

Would you really notice if a beer was missing from the fridge or if some alcohol was missing from a bottle of vodka? If you can get the alcohol out of your house, do so. Dump it or give it to friends. Reduce the amount in the house to what you need for short term use and what can be readily accounted for. Remember, even a good kid can make a dumb decision or succumb to simple curiosity.

Watch your own personal approach/attitude toward alcohol use: Your kids are keenly aware of when you drink and how much you drink. Do you drink to celebrate, to relax, to feel socially comfortable, or as a simple beverage choice at dinner? Your kids will notice.

It may be advisable to evaluate the drinking by adults that your kids are viewing. What does the drinking by adults at the cookout or home party look like **to them?** You would not be out of line to ask guests to: “*tone it down - while the kids are around.*”

Watch what you say about alcohol, for example: *What a day I had today - I need a drink!*

We recommend that your own use, if you drink, reflects that alcohol is not the central component of having a good time (*no big deal*). And perhaps, at times, skip that drink at a restaurant if your kids are along.

And if your kids question why you aren't drinking, a good answer would be that “it is no big deal” to you. You want to demonstrate moderation, caution and respect for the risk of addiction, because nothing that kids see in alcohol advertising, hear in their music, or view on TV or in movies gives them that message.

Be alert for the effects of advertising/media on you too: In fact, parents often fall victim to the same barrage of advertising messages - all of which are carefully designed to make alcohol seem familiar, comfortable, harmless and risk free. Parents are often more worried about illicit drugs like marijuana and cocaine because there is no multi-billion dollar advertising campaign to make them seem safe and familiar.

As a result parents are sometimes less vigilant with alcohol because **they** may not see it as risky... and are therefore less likely to convey a sense of caution or risk to their kids.

Alcohol is the substance that your child is **most** likely to be harmed by or addicted to. Underage drinking results in trying stupid things, taking bigger risks, increased risk of addiction as an adult, teen pregnancy, crime, and decreased school performance.



For more information about preventing underage drinking or how you can get involved in solving the substance abuse problem in Dover visit www.DoverCoalition.org or like Dover Coalition for Youth on facebook.