



FOUNDATION FOR ADVANCING ALCOHOL RESPONSIBILITY

The Role of Fathers in Talking to Children About Alcohol:

Are Dads the Overlooked Parent?

Conversations between parents and their children play a role in determining a child's alcohol use. In fact, previous research shows that parents are the leading influence on a child's decision to drink – or not drink – alcohol¹. While these conversations can be difficult for a parent to navigate, new research shows that moms and dads take a different approach in guiding these conversations and their frequency.

Leading the Conversation About Underage Drinking: Moms vs. Dads

- Mothers reported speaking with their children about alcohol more than fathers: 86% vs. 80%. Further, mothers reported starting these conversations over **one year earlier** than did fathers, with moms starting these conversations at age 5 and dads initiating at almost 6.5 years of age.
- While the majority of moms and dads indicated they share the responsibility of discussing alcohol and underage drinking with their kids, these conversations are not necessarily happening together with both parents at the same time. Mothers reported talking with their children more times than fathers in the last 6 months. Going further, **36% of moms** self-identify as the primary parent discussing alcohol and only 1% say dad is the primary parent discussing alcohol. By comparison, **one-quarter (26%) of dads** self-identify as the primary parent discussing alcohol and 6% cite mom as the primary parent discussing the topic with their children.
- Mothers rate the impact of drinking in front of their children as having a greater impact on their kids than fathers do. Yet **29% of fathers reported concerns** over their own alcohol consumption vs. **17% of moms**.
- Overall, **about 1 in 5** parents reported believing that their own drinking has a strong impact on their child.

¹ Source: GfK Roper Youth Report

When discussing underage drinking with kids, what are moms and dads talking about?

- Fathers are slightly more likely than mothers to think their children already have the information they need about alcohol. Moms are slightly more likely to admit that they are not sure what their children know.
- **21% of dads vs. 30% of moms** have discussed family history and alcoholism with their kids.
- **40% of dads** have discussed responsible consumption vs. **57% of moms**.
- Interestingly, dads are significantly more likely to say they feel prepared to discuss alcohol compared to moms (**78% and 73%, respectively**).
- While both moms and dads report discussing getting in trouble at school, in regards to underage drinking, along with its potential impact on sports performance, **moms out-talk dads in all other categories**. Specifically, mothers are more likely to gravitate to topics around alcohol consumption, the potential dangers, and responsible consumption. Fathers are **significantly less likely** than moms to have discussed the following:
 - how alcohol can interfere with judgment;
 - how alcohol can be included as part of a special occasion among family dinners;
 - that alcohol is illegal if you are under 21;
 - the dangers of drunk driving;
 - how alcohol is unhealthy for a developing brain
 - that alcohol consumption is acceptable for those over the age of 21 years.

Confidence Breeds Conversations

- The group of parents who talk the most to their children are those who are the most confident. As the degree of confidence decreases, so does the rate of talking. For instance, among fathers, as the confidence rating drops to 7, on a 10-point scale, **81% reported talking with their kids** about alcohol vs. **86%** who reported a confidence level of 9. The correlation between confidence and talking is higher among mothers than it is among fathers.
- Among parents with low confidence (ratings less than 6), who consume more (3+ drinks per month) and who rate the impact of drinking in front of their children as low, only 59% have talked to their child. **This difference is greater among fathers with only 41% compared to an overall 59% among mothers.**

Methodology

The #TalkEarly research was directed by Martin Block, Ph.D., Professor in the Integrated Marketing Communications Division of the Medill School at Northwestern University. An online survey of parents conducted in seven waves, beginning in February 2014 and concluding in October 2016. The survey sample size was 18,216 completions. Fieldwork was conducted by Prosper Insights (Worthington, Ohio). An online pre-recruited random sample was provided of adults 18+ in households with children present accounted for 78% of the sample (n=14,164). There was a supplemental sample (n=4,051) provided by #TalkEarly bloggers promoting the survey to their readers accounting for 22%. Among all respondents additional screening was included for parents with children between ages 6 and 17.