

Discussing Alcohol

Preparing Young Adults for Life After High School



Congratulations! You have a high school graduate! And yet, your job still isn't done. As they venture out with more independence as young adults, grab some time with your young adult to discuss risky choices, and ways to prioritize their own safety. Regardless of their plans after graduation, and whether it is college, the workforce, the military, or learning a trade, your teen will soon be exposed to more situations where they will interact with people of different ages, including those who are above the legal drinking age.

Understand the Risks

Find organic ways to engage them around the risks of underage drinking and how these choices may lead to serious consequences. Give specific examples but do not lecture!

Examples include:

- Any underage drinking is risky behavior and illegal under the age of 21.
- Drinking underage can negatively impact the brain's structure and functions since it continues to develop into a person's mid-to late-20s.
- Drinking at an early age may increase the likelihood of developing alcohol use disorder later in life (or as an adult) (NIAAA).

Some drinking behaviors are higher risk and can lead to serious consequences including:

- Drinking on an empty stomach can result in becoming impaired faster.
- Not staying hydrated while drinking.
- Binge drinking (4 or more drinks in a day for a woman, 5 or more drinks in a day for a man).
- Drinking too much, too fast, including engaging in drinking games, chugging, and pregaming.
- Not knowing the contents of your drink.
- Mixing alcohol with drugs or medications (prescription or over-the-counter).
- Drinking and driving.

Determine Your Values

Discuss various reasons why they should refuse a drink and how to say "NO" if they are feeling peer pressured.

Some examples

- How drinking might get in the way of larger goals that they have.
- If it's not in line with your family's belief system or religion.
- If any substance use disorders (like alcohol use disorder) run in your family.

Practice Situational Awareness

Encourage them to pay attention to their surroundings if they are around alcohol by:

- Noticing why people are drinking, the environment in which they're drinking, and how to avoid high-risk situations.
- Being aware of parties where non-drinkers aren't welcome, where the alcohol content of what's being served isn't clear (for example when a pre-mixed punch is served) and games are played to accelerate and produce intoxication.
- Keeping an eye on friends and activate the "buddy system" to step in if someone has overconsumed or needs help getting home safely.

HOT TIP

For those with kids living with roommates after graduation, exchange contact information with their roommates, their roommates' parents and friends. Reassure them that they're always welcome to text.

The conversations you're having will make an impact on the decisions they make as they head off to college, start a new job or launch into increased independence in this next stage of life.



For more information on how to talk to your teenager about the dangers of underage drinking, visit

ResponsibleTeens.org

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