

Your Teen Drank Alcohol... Now What?



You've learned your underage child was drinking alcohol... we've got some do's and don'ts to help parents navigate the situation and foster open communications with your teen.

WHAT TO DO

Prioritize safety first.

If your teen has been drinking, make sure they are safe first and foremost. Do not engage in a lecture or conversation about their choices in this moment.

Approach the topic calmly.

While emotions might be heightened, make sure you are in the appropriate headspace to have a meaningful conversation. Do not react quickly in a flash of anger.

Lead with curiosity. Suspend judgement.

Try to understand the situation and their reasons for making the decision to consume alcohol. This will help you both discuss consequences and how to make better decisions in the future.

Discuss rules and consequences.

Reiterate that it is illegal to drink alcohol under 21 and be consistent with any rules that you've previously put into place. For any consequence for breaking these rules, consider how it will help them learn from their mistakes, rebuild your trust, and keep them safe in the future.

Explain what safe choices mean for them personally.

When you discuss underage drinking, emphasize that underage drinking interferes with normal brain development, negatively impacts mental health, and may lead to other risky situations.

Talk about their behaviors, not their character.

When you talk about your concerns, frustration, or disappointment, make sure you focus on their actions and not who they are as a person.

Watch for signs of bigger problems and seek additional help if necessary.

As you listen to your teen, be mindful of any signs that they might need additional support related to substance use or mental health concerns, and connect with appropriate resources, if needed.

Keep the conversations going and the communication channels open.

This initial conversation should be a starting point for more formal and informal talks about underage drinking. Check in with them periodically, find more organic ways to continue the conversation.



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

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WHAT NOT TO DO

Ignore the issue.

Once you have discovered that your teen has consumed alcohol, ignoring the issue implies that it is acceptable behavior.

Be permissive about underage drinking.

Remember that drinking underage is illegal. While you want to listen to your teen and understand why they made the decision to drink, keep in mind that underage drinking is dangerous and should not be allowed.

Make decisions about consequences when you are still angry.

Anger might be a natural reaction when finding out your teen broke your rules and trust but making decisions about punishments when you are angry might lead to committing to something that is either unrealistic, unenforceable, or detached from the situation.

Use shame, humiliation, or long lectures.

If you want your teen to listen to what you have to say and engage in a conversation, avoid anything that is going to cause them to shut down. Avoid punishments that embarrass them or cause resentment and breaks down their willingness to come to you with other problems.

Use scare tactics.

Base your conversations on facts, not scare tactics. Using fear about dire consequences to discourage your teen to drink can result in a loss of credibility when they see those consequences fail to occur. Stick to science-based facts on how alcohol affects the developing body and brain and the legal consequences of underage drinking.

Make it about yourself.

You might feel many emotions ranging from embarrassment, shame, and guilt to anger and sadness when you discover that your teen engaged in underage drinking. Try to avoid projecting those emotions onto them and dwelling on how this reflects on you. Remember that this is about their decision-making and safety.



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