

April 18, 2023



KNOW! To Prevent Underage Drinking

Know! The Risks

Alcohol is a powerful drug that impairs the body and mind. Anyone can develop alcohol use disorder, even young people.³

Youth who drink alcohol are more likely to experience

- Problems in school, like lower grades and increased absences;
- Social issues, including fighting and social isolation;
- Unwanted, unplanned, and unprotected sexual activity;
- Physical and sexual violence;
- Increased suicide risk;
- Injuries, including alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes;
- Misuse of other substances;
- Permanent changes to brain development; and
- Alcohol poisoning.²

Early initiation of drinking is associated with developing an alcohol use disorder later in life.²

April is Alcohol Awareness Month and the perfect time to start or continue the conversation about underage drinking with the young people in your life.

Rates of underage drinking have been declining in the past decades. Despite this decline, alcohol remains one of the most used substances among youth. In 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 29% of high school students reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days.¹ The 2021 Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey (OHYES!) found that 11.49% of Ohio youth in grades 7 to 12 reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days, and 32% had tried alcohol at least once in their lifetimes.²

Engaging in meaningful discussions about alcohol is critical to preventing youth alcohol use. However, only 53% of Ohio youth reported discussing the dangers of alcohol use with their parents or guardians in 2021.²

Use the following tips to guide your conversations about alcohol use with the young people in your life.

Know! Why Talking Matters

Through a meaningful conversation, you can:

Use your influence

Over 80% of young people say their parents are the primary influence on their decision whether to drink. Having conversations about alcohol use allows you to show your young person that you disapprove of underage drinking.

Share your knowledge

For young people to make informed decisions about alcohol and other drugs, they need reliable information about their dangers. Through conversation, you can become their source for trustworthy information and avoid the myths about alcohol.

Show that you care

Young people are more likely to use alcohol if they think no one will notice they're drinking. Talking about alcohol and how your young person might be exposed to alcohol lets them know that you care about what happens to them.

Create a plan together

Use your conversation to develop a plan for avoiding alcohol use. Practice what to say if someone asks your young person to drink and create a system to use if they need to get out of a situation where they feel pressured to drink or use drugs.⁴

Know! How To Answer The Tough Questions

Why is alcohol bad for me?

Explain that alcohol can cause damage to their growing brain, harm their judgment, and make them sick. Talk about the consequences of underage alcohol use, like injury or death from accidents; unintended, unwanted, or unprotected sexual activity; academic problems; and drug use. Don't try to scare them away from using alcohol or say things like "You can't handle it," which could be interpreted as a challenge. Instead, stick to the facts and use the opportunity to provide accurate information.^{4,5}

I got invited to a party. Can I go?

Ask your young person if an adult will be at the party and if they think there will be drinking. Remind them that being at a party with underage drinking can get them into trouble. Be clear about your expectations for their behavior, and make sure they know that you're available to help them if they're put in a situation that makes them uncomfortable.⁴

Did you drink as a kid?

Be honest about whether you drank as a teenager. Acknowledge that it was risky and emphasize that we know more about the risks of underage drinking than we did in the past. If you didn't use alcohol as a teenager, explain why you chose to grow up alcohol-free. Share your stories about making smart decisions regarding alcohol and the consequences of making unhealthy decisions.^{4,5}

If drinking is harmful, why does it look so fun on TV?

Media, like television and advertising, often glamorizes alcohol consumption. These portrayals often lead teens to believe drinking alcohol will make them popular and happy. Young people with these beliefs are more likely to begin drinking at an early age. You can use media as a jumping-off point to talk about the real dangers of underage drinking and why advertisers might only show a glamorous version of alcohol.³

You drink alcohol, so why can't I?

Make the distinction that underage drinking is always harmful, while it is not always dangerous for adults to drink in moderation. Underage drinking is illegal for a good reason – young people's minds and bodies are still growing, so alcohol has greater harmful effects on them. Explain your reasons for drinking, like enhancing a meal or celebrating a special occasion, but emphasize that you take care not to drink too much and never drink and drive.^{4,5}

What if my friends ask me to drink?

Work with your young person to devise ways to handle a situation where they are asked or pressured to drink. Work together to practice phrases like "No, I don't drink" or "I have to be up early tomorrow" that they can use to turn down alcohol. Remind them that it's okay to go to a party and choose not to drink – they do not have to explain their choices to their peers. Ensure your young person knows that if they are uncomfortable, they can always call/text you (or another trusted adult) for help, no questions asked.^{4,6}

Why do you keep bringing up drinking? It's not like I'm doing it.

Use this question to let your young person know you are there to support them. Show that their choices and safety matter to you. Try saying something like, "I love you and want you to stay healthy, which is why it's important to me that you don't drink. It's natural to be curious about drinking, and I'm here to answer any questions you have." Or consider saying, "I want to make sure you stay safe, so never hesitate to call me if you or one of your friends is in trouble. I'm here if you need me."⁵

Resources:

SAMHSA's "Talk. They Hear You" Campaign
NIAAA – Talk to Your Child about Alcohol
NIAAA – Alcohol's Effects on Health

Stop Alcohol Abuse – Parents and Educators
Parents Who Host Lose the Most

[Superscript sources are hyperlinked at the start of this document](#)

For additional Know! Prevention Tips for Everyone, scan the QR code:

The Know! Tips newsletter is made possible through partnership with the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services



Know! When To Start Talking

For children ages 5 to 7, try focusing the conversation on how alcohol affects the body, judgment, and behavior. Try asking:

- Do you know how drinking alcohol affects the body?
- Why do you think it's against the law for children to drink alcohol?

For adolescents ages 8 to 12, explain how underage drinking is dangerous and practice handling social situations involving alcohol.

Try asking:

- How could you turn someone down if they offered you a drink?
- Have you ever seen an adult drink too much? What happened? How did you feel?

For teens and young adults ages 13 to 20, talk about the risks of alcohol use and good reasons to make safe choices.

Try asking:

- What goes on at parties you attend?
- What worries you the most about people your age drinking?⁵



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