

Teens and alcohol—the facts.

Youth access to alcohol is a serious problem. The consequences are unhealthy, unsafe and even life-threatening. Poor academic performance, injuries, traffic crashes, accidents, assaults, date rape, addiction, teen pregnancy and death from alcohol poisoning are all associated with underage drinking. There is no single solution. But adults and youth working together can have a dramatic impact in reducing the risks.

Who is drinking?

- The median age at which children begin drinking is 15.7 years of age.¹
- Forty-eight percent of high school seniors say they consumed alcohol in the last 30 days.²

Where do they get alcohol?

- Nearly 84% of tenth graders and 67% of eighth graders say alcohol is “fairly easy” or “very easy” to get.³
- Forty-eight percent of 9th graders obtain alcohol from their parents or another adult.⁴
- Teenagers often find someone older to buy it, use a fake ID and purchase it themselves, steal it from stores or take it from their own homes.⁵

The Law

The legal drinking age in all states is 21.

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The Prevention Resource Group

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Reducing underage drinking.

What Every Parent Can Do

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How Parents Can Help

In your homes:

- Understand the risks. Underage alcohol use is more likely to kill young people than all other illegal drugs combined.¹
- Make sure your kids know what you expect regarding underage alcohol use. Set rules with clear consequences. Discuss and agree on them and follow through consistently.
- Refuse to supply alcohol to underage youth in your home or on your property. Supplying alcohol is an invitation for young people to drink illegally. Teen alcohol use is NOT a rite of passage into adulthood. In fact, alcohol has kept too many teens from becoming adults.

A series of lifelines to help keep kids safe from alcohol.

Curfews work — enforce them.

Lock up your alcohol, count it, track it.

Love as a parent, not a friend.

Set rules — voice them, follow them.

Don't be swayed by what other parents are doing.

Never buy alcohol for kids because you think it is safer.

If you think your child is drinking, they probably are — address it now.

Limit alcohol at your own parties — kids are watching.

Never look the other way when alcohol is being served to underage youth.

Band together with other like-minded parents. Face it — as a parent, you will be the bad guy sometimes.

Don't be afraid of losing your child's love, be afraid of losing them.

- Make sure alcohol is not available at other events your teen will be attending. Talk to other parents and party hosts to ensure alcohol-free celebrations. Be proactive: if parents stand together on this issue, they will present a united front for teens.
- Think about where alcohol is kept in your home and how much alcohol you have on hand.
- Create opportunities and activities in your home so your kids and their friends feel welcome.
- Set a good example in the choices you make on a daily basis.

A word about role-modeling.

It's easy to think that kids don't watch what we do. But statistics tell us that parents and their behavior have a huge impact on kids. Think about upcoming family get-togethers and social events. Are there situations where alcohol can be eliminated? Discuss it as a family. Make a decision on what's best for everyone, not necessarily on what's always been done.

What children observe about the way we consume alcohol can be the model they will follow for the rest of their lives. Ask yourself: "How strong is the bond between alcohol and the way we celebrate?"

Teens are at reduced risk for alcohol problems when they have:

- A parent(s) or significant adult who is actively involved.
- Adults who regularly support positive lifestyle choices and activities.
- A sense of responsibility to others.

1. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, 2002.
2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), 2003.
3. "Monitoring the Future Study," National Institute on Drug Abuse, Rockville, MD, 2003. Based on surveys carried out by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center.
4. CAMY, 2003.
5. Johnson, et al. 2005.