

Alcohol and Your Child: What Parents Need to Know



One of the most abused drugs in the United States is alcohol. It's also a drug that many people start using at a very young age. Though it's illegal for people younger than 21 years to drink, many children are introduced to alcohol well before they reach that age. The earlier they begin using alcohol, the higher risk they will have for problems with it later in life. Here is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics to help parents understand the dangers of alcohol and how to prevent alcohol use.

Why parents should worry

- Between 36% and 50% of high school students drink alcohol, and 28% to 60% report binge drinking.
- In 2014, half of 12th graders and one in nine 8th graders reported having been drunk at least once in their life.
- More than 4,300 people younger than 21 years die each year as a result of underage drinking.
- Adolescents who start drinking before 15 years of age are at 4 times the risk of developing alcohol use disorder as those who start drinking after 20 years of age.
- 80% of adolescents say their parents are the biggest influence on their decision to drink or not.

Alcohol is often the first drug that young people try. Since alcohol is legal for those older than 21 years and found in most American homes, it's often easy for children to be around alcohol and its use. Some parents may feel relieved when they find out their teen is "only" drinking alcohol. They may even think it isn't dangerous. Not true! Alcohol can harm your child's normal brain growth and development. Also, if young people like the feeling they get from alcohol, they may be interested in trying other drugs as well.

Risks linked to alcohol use

Even if a person drinks alcohol only occasionally, it can play a part in a variety of risky behaviors. Just one drink can impair decision-making and slow down reaction time. Underage drinking is not legal and is also linked to

- Early sexual activity, multiple partners, unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections, including AIDS.
- Drunk driving. Among 15- to 20-year-olds, nearly a third of all fatal automobile crashes involve alcohol.
- Use of other drugs, such as marijuana or cocaine.
- Health concerns like stunting brain growth, liver damage, hormone imbalances, and addiction to alcohol.
- School problems, such as poor grades and dropping out.
- Injuries that can be deadly or cause long-term problems.
- Crime, violence, and safety concerns.

Why young people drink

Here are some reasons why young people drink.

- Out of curiosity. They have heard that getting drunk is fun, and they want to find out for themselves.

- As a rite of passage. They see drinking as "something everyone does on the way to adulthood."
- To get drunk. This explains why teens drink until they are out of control. Binge drinking (having at least 4–5 drinks within 2 hours) is alarmingly common.
- To "fit in" with friends who drink.
- To feel relaxed and more confident.
- To escape problems, such as depressed feelings, family conflicts, or trouble in school or with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Stages of alcohol use

The same pattern of use exists for alcohol as with other drugs, such as marijuana or cocaine. The following table shows how experts explain the stages of alcohol use. Keep in mind that even if your child doesn't meet criteria for substance use disorder (SUD), all underage drinking is risky. For example, binge drinking, at any stage of use, is very dangerous and should not be condoned.

Stage	Description
Abstinence	The time before an individual has ever used alcohol more than a few sips.
Substance use without a disorder	Very limited use that does not meet the definition of an SUD. The most common problems associated with adolescent substance use (car crashes, unintentional injuries, sexual trauma) can all occur with limited use in teens without an alcohol use disorder.
Mild-moderate SUD	Use in high-risk situations, such as when driving or with strangers. Use associated with a problem such as a fight, arrest, or school suspension. Use for emotional coping, such as to relieve stress or depression. Defined as meeting 2–5 of the 11 criteria for an SUD in <i>DSM-5</i> .*
Severe SUD	Loss of control or compulsive drug use associated with neurologic changes in the reward system of the brain. Defined as meeting 6 or more of the 11 criteria for an SUD in <i>DSM-5</i> .*

*Doctors use the *DSM-5* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*) to assist in diagnosing mental disorders, including SUD (substance use disorder).

How can I tell if my child is drinking?

Certain symptoms and behaviors are warning signs for alcohol use. Look for

- Alcohol odors on your child's breath or clothing
- Alcohol in your child's room or backpack

- Obvious intoxication, dizziness, or bizarre behavior
- Changes in dress and grooming
- Changes in choice of friends; alcohol use by your child's friends
- Frequent arguments, sudden mood changes, and unexplained violent actions
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- Loss of interest in activities
- School problems, such as declining or failing grades, poor attendance, and recent discipline problems
- Runaway and delinquent behavior
- Talk about depression or suicide; suicide attempts

How to prevent alcohol use

Here are ways parents can help their children resist alcohol use.

- Boost confidence and self-worth by praising your child often for what she does well. Avoid constant criticism.
- Listen to what your child says. Pay attention and really listen. Be helpful during periods of loneliness or doubt.
- Know the facts and correct any wrong beliefs your child may have, such as "everybody drinks."
- Know who your child's friends are, and set clear limits. Do not support friendships with others whose parents do not set similar limits. Real friends do not urge their friends to break the rules, such as drinking alcohol, or reject them if they don't. Insist that a parent be at any party your child attends. Don't let your teen go to parties where alcohol is served.
- Make promises. Have your child promise never to get in a car when the driver has been drinking. You must promise your child that you will always be willing to pick him up, no questions asked, when a safe ride home is needed. Promise each other you will talk about it the next day.
- Help your child deal with emotions. Let her know that strong emotions are normal. She can express strong emotions in healthy ways. Talk about concerns and problems. Assure your child that everything has an upside, and things do not stay "bad" forever. Be a good role model in the ways you express, control, or relieve stress, pain, or tension.
- Talk about things that are temptations and those that are important to your child. Talk about school and your child's need for peer-group acceptance. Discuss life goals and desires. Talk about the risk of using alcohol and drugs and how that might prevent reaching those goals. Teach children exactly how you expect them to respond if someone offers them alcohol.
- Encourage healthy ways to have fun. Family activities, sports and physical activities, interests in the arts, and hobbies can all be good uses of leisure time.
- Use teachable moments. Discuss tragedies resulting from alcohol use that are reported in the news. Ask your child what he thinks happened in the story and how tragedy could have been prevented.
- Join your child in learning all you can about preventing alcohol abuse. Programs offered in schools, churches, and youth groups can help you both learn more about alcohol abuse.
- Your child's doctor understands that good communication between parents and children is one of the best ways to prevent alcohol use. If talking with your child about alcohol is difficult, your child's doctor may be able to help open the lines of communication. If you suspect your child is using alcohol or any other drug, ask your child's doctor for advice and help.

Alcohol and the media

No matter how often they hear how dangerous it is to drink alcohol, many young people today still think it's cool. A big reason for this is the media. Alcohol companies spend billions of dollars every year promoting their products on TV, in movies and magazines, on billboards, and at sporting events. In fact, alcohol products are among the most advertised products in the nation.

Alcohol ads never mention the dangers, such as alcoholism and drinking and driving, or how it affects an unborn infant (fetal alcohol syndrome). Most ads show drinkers as healthy, energetic, sexy, and successful. Ads are trying to boost sales of a product, so this product—alcohol—is made to look as appealing as possible!

Here are tips on how parents can address issues related to alcohol and the media.

- Talk about ads with your children. Help them understand the sales pitch—the real messages in these ads.
- Teach your children to be wary consumers and not to believe everything they see and hear on TV.
- Make sure the TV shows and movies your children watch do not show drinking alcohol as cool or glamorous.
- Don't let your children wear T-shirts, jackets, or hats that promote alcohol products.
- Talk with your children's school about starting a media education program.

Parents who drink alcohol

Parents who drink should be careful how alcohol is used at home. Having a drink should never be shown as a way to cope with problems. Don't drink in unsafe conditions—before or while driving a car, mowing the lawn, boating, etc. Don't encourage your child to drink or join you in having a drink. Parents who are problem drinkers or who use alcohol often and in large amounts place their children at increased risk of alcohol dependence. Studies show that alcoholism runs in the family, so children of alcoholic parents are more likely to become alcoholics.

About teen confidentiality

All teens should be screened for alcohol and other drug use as part of routine medical care. Your child's doctor will want to ask questions about alcohol in private to get honest answers. If your child reports alcohol use, the doctor will determine whether your child needs very brief advice, a return visit, or a referral to a specialist. Every doctor will have his or her own policy about what information must be shared with a parent and what will stay confidential (between the patient and the doctor), but most doctors will protect a teen's confidentiality if they believe the teen's drug use is not an immediate safety risk to the child or others. It is important for you to respect the doctor's decisions about confidentiality to encourage your child to have an open and honest discussion with the doctor.

The persons whose photographs are depicted in this publication are professional models. They have no relation to the issues discussed. Any characters they are portraying are fictional.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

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The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is an organization of 64,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

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Web site—www.HealthyChildren.org

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Illustration by
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TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN: TIPS FOR PARENTS

BE AN INVOLVED PARENT

- Show interest in your teenager's activities and friends.
- Talk openly, honestly, and respectfully with your teenager.
- Set clear limits and expectations.
- Know what's going on at school and after school.
- Teach your teenager how to safely avoid violence.

Teenagers are no longer children, but they are not yet adults. While teenagers are developing more independent thoughts, feelings, and values, it is only natural for them to question their parents' rules, beliefs, and expectations. During this time of change, parents often worry about their teenager's safety.

Encourage independence while teaching safety.

As teenagers are testing their new independent roles, it's not an easy time for parents. But if teens don't get love, security, and a feeling of safety from their family, they might look elsewhere, even toward friends who are a bad influence, such as gang members. One of the best ways parents can help their teenagers stay safe is to **teach them how to avoid violence.**

Talking with your teen is one of the most important things you can do to help keep your child safe.

KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON

It's important to understand some of the typical behaviors and feelings of teenagers, even if your teenager thinks you don't!

Teens are very interested in:

- New ways of doing things.
- The present, with little interest in the future. With maturity, the future becomes more important.

Teens often:

- Feel awkward and believe they don't fit in.
- Behave childishly when stressed.

Teens want:

- Role models for themselves.
- To be capable and needed.

SET CLEAR LIMITS AND EXPECTATIONS

Talk about limits to which you can both agree:

- Homework completion and school progress
- How many nights out each week, and how late
- After-school activities or jobs
- Allowance or money
- Safety in and around motor vehicles

Clearly communicate any change in the original limits.

You have specific reasons for deciding to change what was agreed to. You aren't simply giving up because your teen didn't follow the rules.

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

Good communication—talking and listening—with your teenager may be the most important part of your relationship.

Since teens are forming their own identity and testing limits, some conversations may lead to



disagreements and become uncomfortable. Your goal is to have open, respectful, and honest conversations. Teens need to feel loved and that their point of view is respected, even when you disagree.

Positive communication gives teenagers a chance to:

- Learn how to talk honestly and respectfully with others, even when they disagree.
- Feel more confident in discussing their needs and feelings.
- Know that a positive attitude can keep them safe and out of fights.

Make a habit of talking about whatever makes your teen happy.

No matter what your teen's interest—sports, music, clothing, TV, video games, friends, school—ask questions and learn what's going on.

Try to eat together whenever possible. Mealtimes are good times to talk and listen.

Answer questions directly and honestly.

If you have made a mistake, admit it. "I'm sorry" are very powerful words for a teenager to hear from parents.

Notice your teen's feelings. "You seem upset about your relationship with _____."

Be aware of your own reactions and emotions. Teenagers are great at saying or doing things that annoy their parents. Take time to think about your responses and decisions to your teen's requests.

Offer your opinion without lecturing or judging. Know that you may hear something with which you disagree. Avoid statements like, "That's stupid." or "You're wrong." Try saying, "I hear you, but this is how I see it..."

Give all of your attention. If the phone rings, don't answer it. It also is difficult to talk while doing other things, like watching TV.

Offer assistance. "Is there something I can do to help?"

WHEN TALKING IS DIFFICULT

Yelling, threatening, blaming, and name-calling can only make matters worse. Sometimes teens just don't want to talk with their parents.

Consider helping your teen find other caring adults who share your values. It may be easier to hear advice from one of these other adults.

KEEPING YOUR TEEN SAFE

Know where your child is after school. The most common time for teenagers to get into trouble is between 2:00 and 6:00 PM. If not supervised, this is often when teens fight, use drugs, and have sex.

Talk with your child about carrying a weapon. Carrying a weapon makes people feel bold, leading to foolish behaviors. Carrying a weapon gives a false sense of protection and makes your teen less safe.

Teach your child that it takes more courage to walk away from a fight than to fight. Most young people hurt in fights have been fighting with someone they know. Teach your child how to resolve problems without fighting. Your example is the best way for your child to learn this.

Let your teen know that it is more important to know how to walk away from a fight than how to win one, and that it is possible to stand up for yourself without fighting.

IF YOUR TEEN GETS INTO A FIGHT

Often teenagers who get into a fight are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes fighting is the only choice they know.

Talk about what happened:

- Find out what caused the fight. This helps avoid future fights. Did it start with an argument? An insult? Was it revenge? Did it result from being robbed? Getting jumped?
- Listen to the whole story. Try not to interrupt, scold, judge, or problem solve. Just listen.

- Being hurt in a fight can be scary and embarrassing. It's important to pay attention to your teen's feelings.

Find out if the fight is over:

- **Help resolve the problem.** "Are you still afraid? Are you thinking of getting even? Do you think the other person is looking for revenge?"
- **Involve your teen in finding a solution.** "What else could you have done besides fight? Is there someone else who can help you and _____ find a solution to this problem?"

Develop a safety plan for the future:

- **Change routes to avoid known threats.** "Is there another way that you can get home? Can you leave home or school at a different time? Try not to travel alone."
- **Guard against robbery.** "Always know what's going on around you, especially if you are wearing new clothes or flashy jewelry. It may be better to just hand it over. Things can be replaced; you can't."

- **Seek a safe place when being followed.** "Walk or run into a store, police or fire station, or any other public building. Tell them it's an emergency and ask to use the phone to call for a ride. Or, go to a friend's home and get inside quickly."

WHEN YOUR TEEN MAY NEED HELP

Your teen may need help if you notice any of the following warning signs:

- Not talking, or a change in communication style
- Feeling down most of the time—losing interest in friends or activities
- Change in school performance, skipping school, or maybe even dropping out
- Trouble with the law

If you or your teenager needs help, please contact your pediatrician.

Connected Kids are Safe, Strong, and Secure

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The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 66,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2001-JN-FX-0011 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. Some information in this handout has been adapted with permission from the Massachusetts Medical Society's "Street Violence: Your Child Has Been Hurt—What You Can Do" Parent Education Card, Copyright 2000.

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Graphic design and illustrations by Artists For Humanity, a non profit arts and entrepreneurship program for Boston teens.

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Smoking and E-cigarettes: What Teens Need to Know

Many people think that the only people harmed by tobacco and nicotine use are smokers who have smoked for a long time. The fact is that tobacco and nicotine use can be harmful to everyone. This includes unborn babies and people who don't smoke.

If you smoke cigarettes, cigars, or pipes, or use (vape) e-cigarettes or use smokeless tobacco, such as chew or snuff, the best thing you can do for yourself and for everyone around you is to quit. If you have thought about vaping or trying other tobacco products, the best thing you can do for yourself and for everyone around you is to not start.

Here is information from your doctor about the many health risks related to tobacco use and tips for smokers on how to quit.

Facts About Smoking

- Smoking causes 87% of lung cancer deaths. Lung cancer is the leading type of cancer in men and women.
- Every year in this country about 438,000 people die of diseases related to smoking.
- According to the American Cancer Society, smoking kills more people than alcohol, car crashes, suicide, AIDS, murder, and drugs combined.
- About one-third of teen smokers will die of a smoking-related disease.

Smoking and Health Problems

Teen and adult smokers may experience health problems including

- Addiction to nicotine
- Long-term cough
- Faster heart rate
- Lung problems
- Higher blood pressure
- Less stamina and less endurance
- Higher risk of lung cancer and of other cancers
- More respiratory tract infections

Smoking also gives smokers bad breath, yellow teeth, and yellow fingernails; makes hair and clothes smell bad; and wrinkles skin.

Smoking and the Harm to Unborn Babies

Smoking during pregnancy or exposing pregnant women to smoke can lead to many serious health problems for an unborn baby such as

- Miscarriage
- Preterm (premature) birth (born not fully developed)
- Lower birth weight than expected (possibly meaning a less healthy baby)
- SIDS
- Learning problems and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Dangers of Secondhand and Thirdhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is the smoke a smoker breathes out. It's also the smoke that comes from the tip of lit cigarettes, lit pipes, or lit cigars. It contains about 4,000 different chemicals, many of which cause cancer. Because of exposure to secondhand smoke, about 3,400 nonsmokers die of lung cancer every year and 22,000 to 69,000 nonsmokers die of heart disease every year.

Breathing in smoke can cause

- Asthma attacks
- Respiratory tract infections (such as bronchitis or pneumonia)
- Lung problems
- Ear infections
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) (for babies younger than 1 year)

Thirdhand smoke is harmful too. It is the smoke left behind—the harmful toxins that stay in places where people have smoked previously. Thirdhand smoke can be found in walls, on the seats of cars, and even in someone's hair.

Dangers of Alternative Forms of Tobacco

Many people believe that other forms of tobacco, such as e-cigarettes or chewing tobacco, are harmless. This is not true. Nicotine in e-cigarettes is addictive and can harm brain development. E-cigarettes and other tobacco products contain many dangerous chemicals and ingredients that can cause harm to the body.

Facts About Electronic Cigarettes

Electronic cigarettes, also called e-cigarettes, vape pens, or vaping devices, are products that produce an aerosolized mixture containing flavored liquids and nicotine that is inhaled by the user. E-cigarettes can resemble traditional tobacco products, such as cigarettes, or common gadgets, such as flash drives or pens.

Here are more facts.

- E-cigarettes contain nicotine. Youths are especially vulnerable to nicotine addiction because their brains are still developing.
- E-cigarettes come in flavors that are appealing to children.
- Youths who use e-cigarettes are more likely to use traditional tobacco products, such as cigarettes.
- E-cigarettes are not recommended as a way to quit smoking.
- In some cases, e-cigarette devices have exploded, causing burns or fires.
- Long-term health effects on users and bystanders are still unknown.
- E-cigarettes can be used to smoke or vape marijuana, herbs, waxes, or oils.
- E-cigarettes are not approved for smoking cessation by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

How to Quit

Thousands of Americans have found a way to stop smoking. Quitting can be difficult, but it's not impossible. Here are some tips that might help.

- Think of reasons why you want to quit such as
 - You don't like having bad breath and stained teeth.
 - You don't want to risk getting cancer.
 - You don't like being addicted to nicotine.
 - You want to start leading a healthier life.
 - You do not want to waste your money.
 - Your family and friends don't like it.
- Pick a quit date and throw out all your cigarettes.
- Tell people you are quitting and ask for their support. This includes friends, family members, coworkers, teachers, and coaches. Ask friends not to offer you cigarettes. Invite a friend to quit with you.
- Ask your doctor about ways to quit. Learn all you can about quitting. Many tools are available to help people stop smoking. These include nicotine replacement therapy (if you are old enough) in the form of chewing gum, skin patches, nasal sprays, inhalers, or lozenges; medicine to help curb cravings; counseling (telephone-based, Webbased, or face-to-face); and support groups.
- Break the habit. Think of where and when you usually smoke, and figure out what you can do to break that habit. If you smoke first thing when you wake up, try meditation or doing a few stretches or sit-ups instead. If you smoke after a meal, go for a walk with a family member or friend instead. If you smoke with friends during breaks at work, do something to keep your hands busy. Video games can also help break the habit by keeping both hands occupied.
- Find alternatives to smoking. Drink water or a low-calorie drink, chew sugarless gum, or eat a healthy snack, such as sunflower seeds or apple slices. Plan ahead and be ready for the challenges you'll face while quitting.
- Keep your mind busy. Find activities to keep your mind off smoking such as working on a hobby, listening to music, talking to a friend, or exercising.
- Reward yourself. Take the money that you would have spent on tobacco and buy something for yourself.

Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics

Julius B. Richmond Center of Excellence

AAP.org/RichmondCenter

American Cancer Society

800/ACS-2345 (800/227-2345)

www.cancer.org

American Lung Association

800/LUNG-USA (800/586-4872)

www.lungusa.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/index.htm

Smokefree.gov

800/QUIT-NOW (800/784-8669)

www.smokefree.gov

Surgeon General

<https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov>

Surgeon General Report "Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults"

(Consumer Booklet)

www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sg/2012/consumer_booklet/pdfs/consumer.pdf

Truth Initiative

www.truthinitiative.org

From Your Doctor



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