

5 Ways to Talk with Young Adults About Alcohol and Drugs

(From parenttoolkit.com).

Further additional reading:

Website: The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility: <https://responsibility.org/>

Website: Partnership for Drug-Free Kids: <http://www.drugfree.org/>

If you haven't had a talk about substance use with your teen before, now is the time to start. Check out these tips.

The new-found freedom young adults get as they move out of the house can come with risky behaviors, like experimenting with drugs and alcohol. According to the [2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), about two out of every five young adults (ages 18-25) are binge drinkers. That means they are drinking four or more drinks in one sitting for women, and five or more drinks in one sitting for men.

In a perfect world, you've been talking with your kids about making responsible decisions since they were young. But if you haven't had a talk about substance use before, now is a great time to start. This transition time is a great opportunity to revisit or start the conversation, as you are still a role model that your kids look up to. Even if they don't show it, your teens are still listening to you and will appreciate (if only in the long run) your attention to this topic.

Keep It Informal

This conversation doesn't need to be a big production. If you're watching television together and an ad for beer comes on, that's a perfect time to strike up a casual conversation. As 17-year-old Lily says about her conversations with her parents,

"If it comes up, we can keep a calm and fair conversation about it all."

The car is another place to start a conversation on the topic, especially as you have a captive audience. In the car, you won't have to make eye

contact as much, which can make your teen feel more comfortable. If you need help keeping the conversation going, try to ask open-ended questions that will solicit more than a “yes” or “no” answer.

Start From Love

Teens are more likely to engage in a conversation with you if it’s one that actually feels like a conversation, not a lecture. To do that, the director of the Center for Adolescent Research and Education (CARE), Stephen Gray Wallace recommends starting with love. Start with:

“You know, I really want to sit down and talk to you about alcohol use because you’re going away to college and I love you and I want you to achieve your goals,” rather than “You and I need to talk because you’re moving out and you need to make good decisions.”

“If you start from a place of love and concern, it opens up a lot of doors,” Wallace says. You may even be surprised by the response that you get.

17 year-old Riley from California has had conversations with her parents about alcohol, and she says she’s always felt supported in those discussions.

“Personally I have no interest in drinking and they know that, but they also say that if you were ever going to make that decision to be responsible. They’ve said we will never get mad at you, you should always text us. We will get mad at you if you get yourself into a bad situation and don’t call us.”

Highlight Consequences

Being realistic about consequences of over-indulging is another way to educate your teen about the risks of substance use.

The **consequences** include an inability to make responsible decisions, assault, date rape and sexual assault, injury, and even death. In less extreme cases, substance use can lead to lower college grades, falling behind in class, or posting inappropriate photos or video on social media.

Then, there are unintended consequences. For example, a derogatory or inappropriate post on social media can result in getting fired from a job. Wallace likes to share a story about a high school senior whose college acceptance was revoked after he was suspended from school for being at a party where alcohol was served. One choice can have really big consequences your teen might not even be thinking of. Wallace says kids often seem bewildered by consequences that they weren't expecting. You can help your kids connect the dots between choices they may make and consequences of those actions by highlighting stories like these.

Help Them Plan

If your teen is drinking at college, or after work, they may need ideas to help them if they're unsure how to remove themselves from a situation or to stand up to peer pressure. By discussing options ahead of time, you can help them be prepared later.

Ask them questions about different scenarios they might find themselves in. For example:

- “How do you think you'll respond if you show up at a party where people are using drugs? What if they offer some to you?”
- “Have you thought about what you might do if you're at a party that you want to leave, but your friends want to stay?”
- “What do you think you'll do if your designated driver ends up drinking or using drugs?”
- Offer additional suggestions if they need help answering the questions like:
- Highlight that for jobs and some college extracurricular activities, your teen could be subject to random drug testing. Even if they aren't subject to it, it's a good excuse for them not to use.
- Have a secret family code with your teen, like “1-1-1” or “How is grandma doing?” that they can easily text you if they need your help. You or another family member can then be the one to call and check-in with them, giving them an excuse to leave the room or remove themselves from a situation.
- Consider a ride-sharing app like Uber or Lyft that is linked to your account. That way, your teen never has an excuse to get in a car with someone or has to worry about paying for a cab.

Listen

A conversation should be just that, a two-way discussion. Try not to talk down to or talk over your teen. Really listen to their responses and try to be a resource they can use. If you create a family culture of being able to discuss anything and everything, your kids will feel more comfortable sharing information with you and asking for advice. Keeping the lines of communication open are a great way to have not just one discussion about drugs and alcohol, but an ongoing discussion about healthy risks, responsible decisions, and reaching goals. This applies for substance use, but also a variety of other topics as well.