

A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers

But You and Dad Drink...

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You were a teenager once, but times have changed.

It is important to try to understand what it is like to be a teenager today. Kids are discovering alcohol a lot earlier. Recent studies show that approximately 75 percent of high school students have tried alcohol, and over 25 percent of high school students are binge drinkers. While this might increase the fears you have of what your teens might get into, it also increases the fears teens have and the social pressure they face.

Can I use my experiences to help my teen?

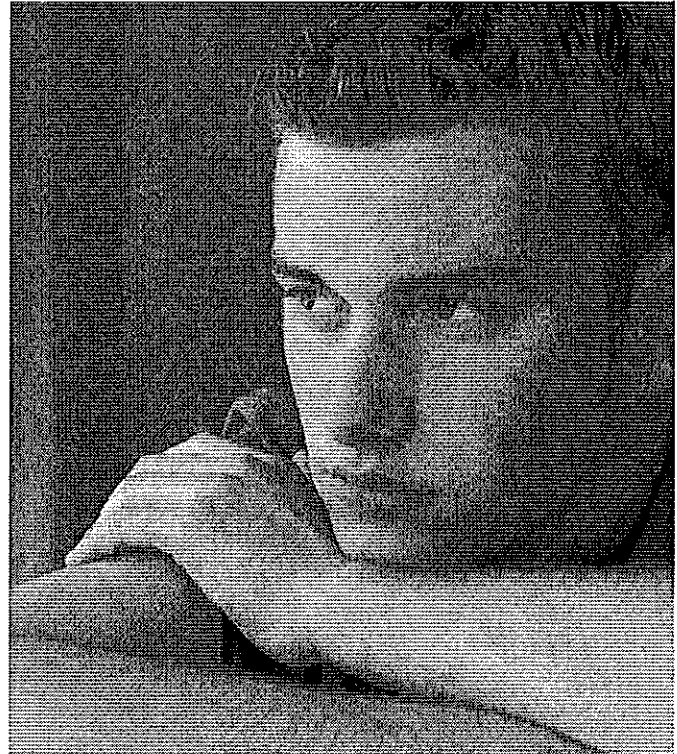
We all experienced struggles growing up. Use your own experiences and mistakes to offer advice to your teen, not to lecture them. They already know you are not perfect. Teens are able to recognize a contradiction when you yell at them for doing the same things you once did. Be honest, and your child will respect you more, no matter what you did when you were their age.

How do I know what to say?

To talk with your kids about alcohol, you must have the information to answer their questions accurately, and provide them with practical advice on how to deal with the issues important to them. It is not enough just to tell your teen, "You better not drink!"

Tips for talking with your teenager about alcohol:

- Find the facts. Check out the books and websites listed on back for more information, and answer your child's questions as soon as possible.
- Listen carefully to their concerns and feelings, and respect their views.
- Let them know it is okay to act independently from the group and that it is okay to say, "No, I don't drink."



- Establish a clear family position on alcohol use. For example, "Once you're 21, it is okay to have a drink with friends. It is not okay to drink to solve problems."
- Behave in a way that is consistent with your family rules. How do you use and talk about alcohol in front of your kids? Kids learn by watching you. If you suspect a severe problem, seek outside help.

"Just say no" isn't good enough!

Telling your teenagers to just say no isn't going to be enough to prevent them from drinking when all their friends are drinking, playing drinking games, having fun, and offering them drinks. Practice how to say no in different situations with your teens. Give your teenagers options for saying no and let them choose which they feel the most comfortable using.

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Alternatives to “Just say no”:

- It is okay to say, “I just don’t want to.”
- Suggest another activity like basketball, shopping, eating, or change the subject.
- It is okay to avoid situations where there might be drinking or to hang out with friends who don’t drink.
- Encourage your child to use you as an excuse. Tell them it is okay to say things like “My mom won’t let me go,” or “My dad would kill me if he ever caught me drinking.”
- It is okay to be at a party and not drink or to pretend that you are drinking. It is not okay to get in a car with someone who has been drinking.

How does my alcohol use affect my teen?

Teens learn what it means to be a person who drinks by watching you. If you drink when you’re upset your teen will learn that drinking is a way to solve problems. If you push people to drink after they say no, tease people who don’t drink, or center your activities around alcohol, your teen will learn that drinking is the way to fit in and have fun. If you drink and drive, your teen will learn that this is an okay risk.

If someone in your family has a problem with alcohol, don’t try to hide it from your teen. Teens know when there is a problem, and they may feel responsible for the alcoholic’s drinking. Services like Al-Anon and Alateen can help.

How do I know if my teen has a problem with alcohol?

Here are some of the warning signs:

- Using alcohol on a regular basis.
- Drinking alone.
- Depression or mood swings.
- Hangovers, bad breath and/or bloodshot eyes.

- Talking about alcohol frequently and in a positive way.
- Problems with school.
- Taking risks, such as driving after drinking.

Where to go for help:

If you suspect your teen has a problem with alcohol, you can contact your physician, school counselor, an independent drug counselor, or the resources listed below to get help for your teen and your family.

Where you can go for more information:

University of Minnesota Extension
www.parenting.umn.edu

UMN Children, Youth & Family Consortium
www.cyfc.umn.edu

American Council for Drug Education
<http://www.acde.org/>

Family Guide: Keeping Youth Mentally Healthy & Drug Free
<http://www.family.samhsa.gov>

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
1-800-729-6686
<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

You may also want to look at:

Blume, J. (1986). *Letters to Judy: What your kids wish they could tell you*. New York: G. P. Putnam.

Schaefer, C. E., & DiGeronimo, T. F. (1999). *How to talk to teens about really important things*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Steinberg, L., & Levine, A. (1997). *You and your adolescent: A parent’s guide for ages 10-20*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Adapted from University of Illinois Extension fact sheets written by the author.

www.parenting.umn.edu

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