

The Responsible Parent



Talking to your kids about alcohol

**New Hampshire
Liquor Commission
Bureau of Enforcement**

"Make Good Choices..."



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Alcohol is a drug.

If you find it difficult to talk to your children about alcohol use, you're certainly not alone. Even parents who give their children a clear "no use" message about illegal drugs find it hard to be as tough with their children about alcohol use. After all, although it is a drug, alcohol is legal for adults who are 21 or older.

However, it's alcohol (not heroin, marijuana or cocaine), that's the leading cause of death and injury (e.g., car crashes, falls, drownings and suicides) among teenagers and young adults.

Prevention begins at home.

Parents have the most influence on their children's lives. They play a major role in determining whether children will experience alcohol or other drug related problems. Recognizing that this puts a big responsibility on you, we've assembled this prevention guide to assist you.

Start while they're young.

Many parents make the mistake of waiting until their children are driving, or high school, before talking about the problems and responsibilities associated with alcohol use.

While it is important to discuss alcohol use with teens, recent studies show that many attitudes about alcohol and other drugs are formed much earlier in a child's life. In fact, close to 50% of fourth through sixth graders report pressure from other students to try alcohol. And by the time they're 12, a growing number of children can name the brand of alcohol they want to drink.

A child's first use of alcohol or other drugs usually takes place between the ages of 12 and 14. That's why it's imperative you begin talking openly and naturally about alcohol and other drugs to your children between kindergarten and grade three. That way, they'll be more likely to accept views and information rather than relying on peers or the media.

Tell them the facts

Children are less likely to use alcohol and other drugs if they know that this behavior is unacceptable to their parents. This means telling children what you expect of them and what the consequence will be if they don't meet these expectations. Try using this four-step process:

1. Have in mind exactly what you expect. Both parents should be in agreement on expectations. For health and legal reasons, we recommend advocating no use of alcohol until of legal age (which is 21 for all 50 states in the U.S.)
2. Sit down with your children and tell them exactly what you expect and why. Make sure they understand. Let them know you are serious.
3. Tell your children what will happen if they don't meet your expectations. **Choose consequences that are appropriate, immediate and important to your children.**
4. Be prepared to follow through. Be realistic about consequences. If you make them too severe, you may be reluctant to impose them. **Consistent follow-through is very important.**

Teach them how to say "no".

Using or not using alcohol and other drugs is a decision; a decision your children are being forced to make at an increasingly early age. That's why it's very important to teach young children decision making skills as early as possible.

Help your children practice ahead of time so they'll know what to say when someone confronts them about alcohol or other drugs. Tell them that although you expect them to refuse, you understand that saying "no" is difficult even

To begin, work with your children to develop responses that they feel comfortable with, using the following questions and situations. Don't just tell them what to say, and expect them to parrot you.

- "What would you do if some older kids came up to you at school and offered you some marijuana?"
- "What could you say if you've finished babysitting and Mr. Jones wants to bring you home, but he's been drinking alcohol?"
- "What would you say if your friends offered you some beer? What would you say if they called you a chicken or a baby?"

Help your children come up with appropriate responses, such as, "No thanks, not tonight" or, "My dad would ground me," or just plain "NO." Take time to listen and show concern. If your children practice saying the answers ahead of time, chances are they'll actually use them when a situation comes up.

Be aware of other influences.

Whether you're talking with them about it or not, your children are receiving powerful messages about alcohol. These messages are coming from their peers, the media, and even from your own unconscious behavior.

As a parent, you can't control all the information your children receive about alcohol, however, as their single greatest influence, you have the unique ability to prepare them for peer pressure and onslaught of pro-alcohol messages to come. **Some suggestions on counteracting pro-alcohol messages include:**

- Be selective about television shows, movies and concerts that show alcohol and other drug use as normal and fun.
- Point out the negative effects of alcohol use when your children are watching TV shows, com

- commercials, or movies that portray alcohol use as funny or attractive.
- Makes sure your children's parties are chaperoned and that alcohol and other drugs will not be available. If you have doubts, don't be afraid to say "NO" to your kids.
- Get to know your children's friends and their parents. Know where your children will be, whom they will be with, and what they will be doing.
- Set reasonable curfews for you children and be clear about places and people that are off limits.

Set a good example.

Remember that children are like mirrors. In front of them, even the most casual of gestures and comments about alcohol use take on great importance. Their actions reflect what they see. By setting good examples, you'll increase the chance that your children will make healthy decisions about alcohol and other drugs.

- If you drink, let your children see that you drink small amounts that don't produce intoxication. Also, let them see you abstain from drinking at times, and hear you say, "No thanks, I'm driving."
- If you don't drink, explain to you children that you have made that choice.
- Show your children you are a responsible host by having non-alcoholic drinks available for guests, never "pushing" drinks, and by serving food with drinks.
- Demonstrate positive ways to handle stress. Don't make casual comments about "needing a drink to relax" or "deserving a drink" after an especially difficult day.

- Treat alcohol like the dangerous substance that it is. Don't have your children serve drinks in your home, and don't ask them to get you a beer from the fridge.

Get Help if needed.

There may be individuals in your home, (grandparents, older siblings or other relatives), who are unable to control their drinking. If so, they're not only hurting themselves, they're also increasing the likelihood that your children will have difficulties dealing with alcohol in the future.

People who are chemically dependant can't be expected to stop by themselves. Alcoholics need professional assistance to stop drinking. Treatment works, and it's usually covered by insurance. If it isn't, local resources may be available. There's a good chance that there's a service provider in your community or nearby that specializes in alcohol and other drug related problems.

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