

Talk to your teenager about alcohol

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 a majority of teens in high school have tried alcohol, and at least 30 per cent of these students are binge drinkers.

Teens today hear mixed messages about drinking. One minute they hear “Just say no!” or “Don’t drink and drive.” Television commercials, magazine ads, and the Internet suggest that drinking is fun, sexy, romantic, adult or macho. They may also know adults who use alcohol to relax, get rid of stress or to socialize.

Fortunately, parents continue to have a powerful influence on their children’s attitudes toward alcohol. When teens feel connected to their families and at the same time get clear no-use messages, they are less likely to abuse alcohol.

How does your use of alcohol affect your teen?

Your teen learns about drinking by watching you. If you drink when you’re upset, or when you are alone, your teen will learn that drinking is a way to solve problems.

If you push friends to drink after they say no, tease people who don’t drink or centre your activities around alcohol, your teen will learn that drinking is a way to fit in and have fun.

If you drink and drive, your teen will learn that this is an OK risk.

How can you help prevent alcohol use?

Monitor your teen’s activities. Researchers have found that lunchtime and between 3 p.m.-6 p.m. are times when young people are likely to experiment with alcohol. Know where your child is and what he is doing during these times. Young people who are closely supervised rarely drink on a weekly basis.

Communicate with your teen. Many parents are concerned about the abuse of alcohol. But they don’t always talk about their views and concerns with their children. Rather than waiting until a

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problem arises, talk to your teen about your concerns and the messages she might be getting from the media and her peers.

Help your teen or preteen deal with peer pressure. You can help your teen come up with ideas for saying no when he feels pressured to drink. Here are some things he could say: “I don’t like the way it tastes,” “I’ll be grounded for life if my dad finds out I’ve been drinking.” Tell him he can “blame” you

TEENS IN TROUBLE?

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

If you suspect your teen has a problem with alcohol, talk to your physician, school counsellor or a drug counsellor.

when under pressure. He might say, “My mom is going to give me a driving lesson this afternoon.” Assure them that many times a simple “no thanks” or “not today” will do.

Know the facts about alcohol. Learn about the effects of alcohol on the teenage body and on driving, and the risks of alcohol abuse.

Remain calm. Research shows that many teens will use alcohol once in a while. Try to stay calm if this

happens and carry through with consequences.

Guide and limit. Parents need to guide their teens and set clear and reasonable rules.

For example: “There will be no drinking and driving.” Calmly talk about alcohol before problems start. Use news reports about alcohol-related accidents to discuss the harmful outcomes of drinking.

Make a contract. Some families have found it helpful to sit down together and write up a parent-teen “contract” for no drinking and driving. In the contract, the teen agrees not to ride in a car when the driver has been drinking. They agree to call their parents for a ride if they or the driver of the car has been drinking. Parents agree to pick up their teen and not discuss the event until the following morning.

Encourage healthy,

creative habits. Make sure your kids have enough structure in their lives. Create activities for them or encourage them to take part in sports, school programs and hobbies — anything that they can have fun with. Even better, join your kids in having fun.

Alcohol is often used by young people as a way of coping with the many changes they are experiencing. The number of teens who say they drink to get away from problems and deal with frustration has been steadily rising. Unfortunately, drinking in these circumstances makes things worse, never better. Most kids want their parents to take a firm stand and help them say no to alcohol.