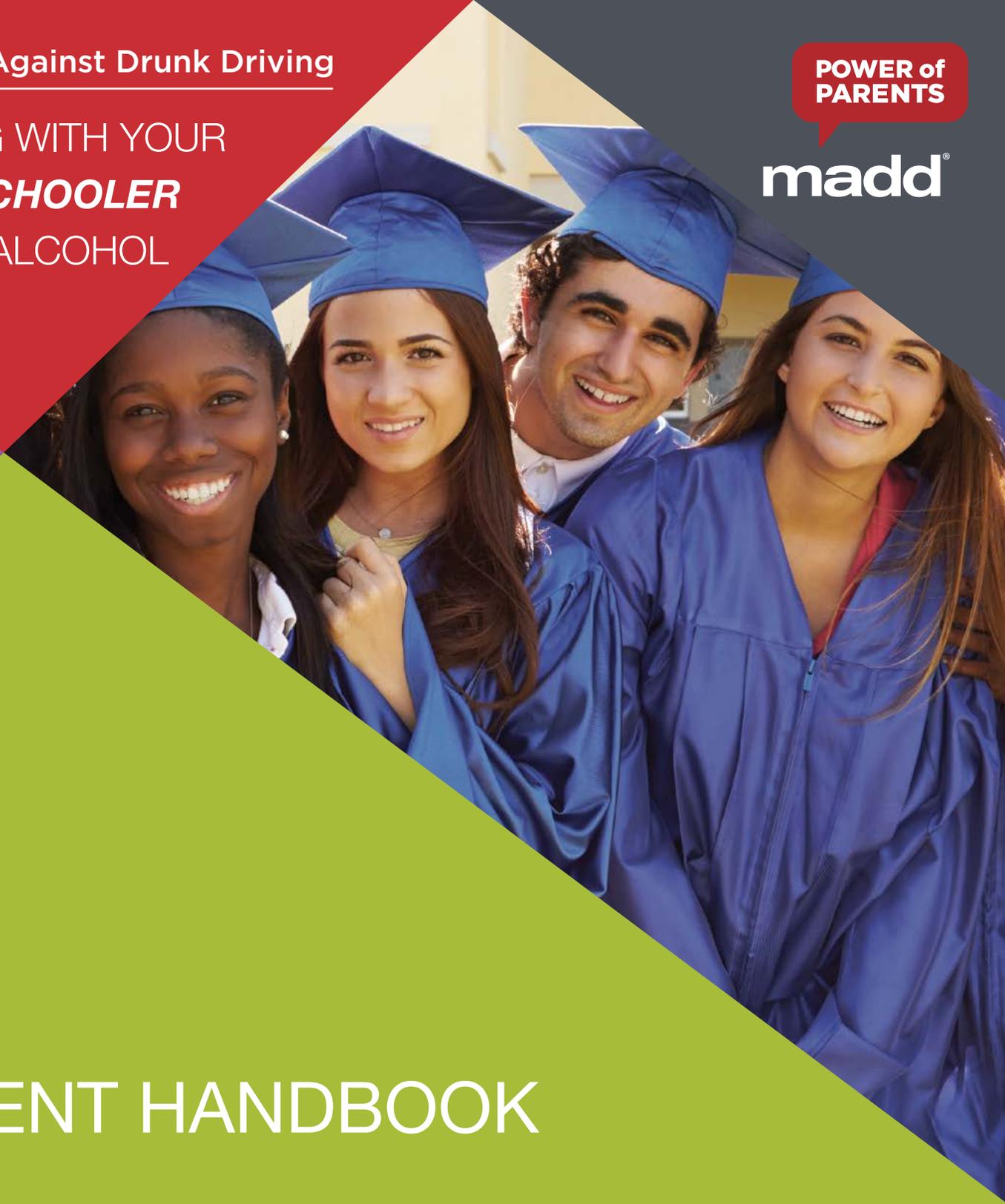


Mothers Against Drunk Driving

TALKING WITH YOUR  
***HIGH SCHOOLER***  
ABOUT ALCOHOL

POWER of  
PARENTS

madd®



PARENT HANDBOOK

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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# Introduction

## A MESSAGE TO PARENTS FROM DR. TURRISI AND MADD

Being a parent is intensely rewarding, but also deeply challenging. Despite a common misconception that as children enter high school their friends become all-important and parental influence weakens, research shows that parents are still the most important source of information for older adolescents. Further, our research shows that parents:

1. **ARE motivated to talk with their children and teens**
2. **ARE willing to learn new ways to reach out to their teens**
3. **DO make a difference when it comes to reducing risky adolescent behavior!**

Too many teens die or suffer life-altering consequences from drinking underage. In addition, young people under 21 are over-represented in both alcohol-impaired driving and passenger fatalities. Last, studies show that 1 in 3 teens combine alcohol use with other drugs (e.g., marijuana, nicotine and other stimulants) and experience 2 to 3 times more consequences on those occasions! All of these harms and tragedies are 100% preventable.

***This is where you come in as a parent to make things change.***

Fortunately, as a parent—you are a “changer”—you DO have the POWER to change the way your child thinks about alcohol and other drugs. You can change your

parenting and communication style. You can even change your child's future.

All of the best information from decades of studies done in the United States and Europe points to the same thing, with no exceptions – children and teens are safer when there are family rules present:

### Family Rules

- No alcohol use before age 21
- No drug use
- No alcohol or drug impaired driving
- Never ride with someone who has been drinking or using other drugs

## HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

We created this handbook based on the best information available to help parents talk to teens about alcohol and marijuana, keep them from driving impaired, and keep them from getting in a car with an impaired driver. This handbook will improve how you and your teen relate to each other and can help you protect your teen. Since each family is different, you will likely relate to some sections of this handbook better than others. That's ok. Not all families are the same and we respect those differences. After reviewing the entire handbook, use the parts that are helpful to you and your family.

**We urge you not to underestimate how dangerous alcohol and marijuana, impaired driving, and riding with impaired drivers are for teens.**

**By following the handbook's suggestions, you can help equip your teen to make smarter, safer choices.**

# Your Teen's World

*As young people grow into teens, they face many changes:*

- Their bodies mature and develop.
- They face new pressures at school and socially.
- They encounter new moral dilemmas about risky behaviors, alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs.

**The changes teens go through affect how they think about alcohol, marijuana and other drugs, driving, and getting into cars with friends who drive impaired.**

To communicate effectively with your teen about alcohol, marijuana, and other risks, it helps to understand how these changes affect his or her world.

## FINDING HIS OR HER OWN WAY

Teens often feel that the world revolves around them. They get self-conscious and are easily hurt by critical comments. A teen assumes, “no one has ever felt the way I feel.” Because a teen feels unique, if a parent says “I know how you feel,” the teen may reject this as impossible.

This is why most teens make decisions based on emotions and how they feel at the moment. This is a normal part of brain development. As teens get older,

and their brains develop, they can become more thoughtful.

Instead of telling them what to do or what is right or wrong, you might ask “**How** would you handle an invitation to a party where there will be older kids?” “**What** things could you say?” “**Why** do you think drinking alcohol, using marijuana, or taking other drugs, or impaired driving, or getting into a car with a friend that has been drinking is dangerous?”



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Studies have consistently shown that helping others reach their own conclusions about the pros and cons of different alternatives are more effective than telling them what is right and wrong. Your children are no different in that way.

## GOING ALONG WITH A GROUP

Teens include others in their problem solving. If their peers do something, it makes the behavior seem more okay. Teens are less likely to rely on their own standards and values, and may justify decisions by saying, “but everyone is doing it.” Teens often believe they should be excused for misbehavior if they had not planned to do something wrong. They may say, “We did not mean to drink; things just happened.”

Again, you can help them with their thinking and planning by asking them questions starting with *how*, *what*, and *why*. “How would you handle a situation where other kids, including some of your friends, drank alcohol or used marijuana at a party or friend’s house?” “What things could you do?”

Instead of forcing advice on an unreceptive teen, explain that you respect his or her decisions but as a parent you care and would like to discuss the situation.

## TIP

As a parent, your role is to help them develop and learn how to use information to think and make plans. Use questions that start with how, what, and why to help develop their thinking and planning skills.



### ***Where Peers Fit In***

One reason why your teen is strongly influenced by friends is that peers have a similar level of power in the world. This “level playing field” allows teens to work out problems together, instead of just giving in to a more powerful individual, like a parent or a teacher.

## **SHORT-TERM THINKING**

The teen brain focuses on what’s happening right now. When a teen thinks ahead, it usually means he or she is wondering about what to do this weekend, not next year. That’s why your son or daughter isn’t terribly concerned about the future.

This puts teens at a disadvantage when they face choices about risky behaviors that can have long-term consequences, such as drinking. Using the how, what and why approach can help build thinking and planning skills that will help them see further into the future.

### ***When It Comes to Alcohol and Marijuana***

Teens may know the potential risks of drinking or using marijuana, but think, “My friends drink and use marijuana and nothing bad has ever happened.” That friend’s experience can have more impact than facts. Do not assume that giving information or statistics is enough to convince your teen not to drink alcohol.

Teens believe, “Nothing bad will happen to me.” They assume negative things happen to others, not to them.

## **Risky Business**

Because teens are still developing, they take more risks with alcohol. They act impulsively and don’t recognize that their actions, such as drinking, have consequences.

*Alcohol and marijuana are especially attractive to teens because they reduce their social anxiety more than they do for adults.*



## **Share the Facts!**

***Kids who drink alcohol or use marijuana before age 21 are more likely to:***

- Face problems in school
- Abuse alcohol or other drugs later in life
- Get assaulted
- Drown or fall
- Die in a car crash

# What Style of Parent Are You?

Parents rely on certain strategies for raising their children. Do any of the parenting styles below seem familiar to you?

## AUTHORITARIAN

*Authoritarian parents tend to use parental power to control their children.*

- Teens must do what they are told or else face serious consequences.
- Parents are unconcerned if teens understand the reasons behind rules. Parents don't tolerate teens asking for explanations.
- Parents use threats and punishment to keep teens in line.



### Two parents, two styles?

Sometimes parents have different styles. For example, a father might be authoritarian while the mother is overprotective. This can create even more confusion for the child as he or she attempts to meet the expectations of both parents.

*Research shows that teens who feel threatened by their parents may behave well when the threatening parent is nearby, but act out when the threatening parent is gone. These teens have difficulty behaving properly without external control. Children of authoritarian parents are less likely to develop internalized values that equip them to make wise decisions.*

**By focusing on obedience, authoritarian parents lose their ability to influence their teen through reasoned discussion or to help them develop good thinking skills.**

If parents impose very strict rules, teens often defy them. Then parents punish the teens and the teens in turn become more rebellious. It can become a vicious cycle.

Angry teens may finally say: “I don’t care how you punish me. You can’t control me. Take away whatever you want. Lock me up. Kick me out. It doesn’t matter because I will still do what I want.” At this point, authoritarian parents lose their influence.

*Research shows: Compared with all teens who drink illegally, teens of authoritarian style parents tend to consume the most dangerously high levels of alcohol.*

## OVERPROTECTIVE

Overprotective parents shield their children from the harsh realities of life. Like authoritarian parents, they exert a lot of control over their children, but their method is different.

Instead of using rules and threats, overprotective parents present themselves as allies. They see the world as a threat and express this fearfulness to their children. Then they rescue their children from dealing with any harsh reality.

For example, instead of helping children understand difficult homework assignments, overprotective parents actually do the work for them. This leaves a child poorly prepared to deal with the realities of adult life.

Overprotected children lack experience and may panic in stressful situations.

## Seeking Positive Balance

We have explained parenting styles here to let you know about the potential consequences of being an authoritarian, overprotective, or permissive parent.

We do not mean for you to question every parenting action: “Am I being too permissive? Am I being authoritarian?” *Too much questioning can paralyze you as a parent.*

Instead, be careful to avoid extremes and seek a positive balance.

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## PERMISSIVE RULE SETTING

*Permissive rule setting parents take a hands-off approach. They:*

- Do not set expectations. Instead, they feel teens should be independent.
- Permit their teen to explore the world without “interfering.”
- Feel kids should be free to make mistakes and learn from them accordingly.

Permissive rule setting parents may not face as much rebellion as authoritarian or overprotective parents do. But permissive rule setting parents deprive their children of wise guidance in developing effective problem-solving skills.

In most instances permissive rule setting parents do so to help their teens. They think that by setting permissive rules their teens will be more honest with them and will tell the truth about their alcohol or marijuana use. Studies show that teens rarely tell their parents exactly how often and how much they use alcohol. Teens often will grossly under-report risky behaviors to their parents (including alcohol and marijuana use).

*Research shows: Teens of permissive style parents tend to drink more often and heavier, use marijuana and other drugs, ride with others who are impaired, drive while impaired themselves, experience more problems in school and with the law, and are also more likely to be victims of crime. They also report having parents who are less willing to talk with them and have poorer relationships with their parents as well.*

### Parents Do Make a Difference.

Despite how you may feel sometimes, research shows that parents are an important influence on whether or not teens choose to drink alcohol or use marijuana and other drugs.



## POSITIVE

*Positive parents focus on empowering their children to grow and learn. They:*

- Take an active role in teaching their teen responsibility.
- Tend to use the how, what, and why question approach.
- Set clear expectations about teen behavior, such as waiting until age 21 before drinking alcohol, no marijuana use, no impaired driving, and no getting into cars with others who have been drinking or using other drugs.
- Set and enforce rules prohibiting drugs.
- Explain reasons behind their expectations and encourage teens to talk about any concerns.
- Set and enforce consequences when agreements are not met.
- Use their power to create change.

Positive parents know that their own age, knowledge, experience, and material resources give them more power than their children. Positive parents use that power to strengthen and protect their teens and help them grow into effective individuals.

**Positive parenting is generally the most effective parenting style.**

## Boost Self-Esteem

Teens who have high self-esteem are better equipped to make smart choices, deal with peer pressure, and avoid underage drinking.

***Boost your teen's self-esteem by:***

- Praising achievements
- Helping set realistic goals
- Giving choices
- Offering responsibilities
- Focusing on teen's strengths without comparing to others
- Taking all of your teen's concerns seriously

Positive parenting can be difficult, because parents gradually relinquish control and give kids more freedom and responsibility with each passing year. These parents respect a teen's drive for independence, yet maintain legitimate limits. Their philosophy is to build trust and teach skills that empower the teen to take increasing control of his or her life.

Instead of threatening severe punishment for bad behavior, positive parents discuss, set, and enforce clear consequences for breaking rules. They encourage teens to talk about problems and build problem-solving skills by using the **how**, **what**, and **why** approach.

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*Research shows: Teens of positive style parents tend to not drink or drink far less often and in smaller amounts. They do not use marijuana, they do not ride with others who are impaired, and they do not drive while impaired themselves. They are also far less likely to experience more problems in school and with the law, and are far less likely to be victims of crime.*

*In contrast to other parenting styles, their teens report that their parents are more willing to talk with them and also report having better relationships with their parents.*

### **Parents do make a difference**

Despite how you may feel sometimes, research shows that parents are an important influence on whether or not teens choose to drink alcohol or use marijuana or other drugs, get into a car with someone who has been drinking or using other drugs, or drive when impaired.

### **Teens do care about their parents' opinions. They especially respond well to a positive parenting style.**

Research has consistently shown that teens do care about their parents' opinions when their parents adopt a positive style. *These same studies also show that it is never too late to adopt a new approach to parenting.* Even when parents have been overprotective, authoritarian, or permissive in the past, children respond extremely well to parents who are willing to change. In contrast, many studies show that authoritarian, overprotective, and permissive parenting can lead to negative outcomes.

Last, it is wise to understand parenting styles, but too much time spent worrying about your parenting style can paralyze you as a parent.

Instead, try to avoid the extremes and find a more positive approach to parenting. This is an important step you can take to prevent underage drinking or other drug use, impaired driving, and your teen getting into a car with a driver who is impaired.

## **The Bottom Line**

Positive parenting strategies can help your child's brain development, thinking, and planning.

**For more information on how parenting styles can influence teen drinking, visit [MADD at madd.org](http://madd.org) / [powerofparents](http://powerofparents)**

# Talking About Alcohol

The first step in talking with your teen about alcohol, impaired driving, and riding with friends who drive impaired, is simply getting started. Often, the conversation takes more than one sitting and evolves over time. As a parent, you must take active steps to start this conversation. Suggest to your teen that you would like to talk. Don't expect the teen to agree. In fact, many teens respond negatively. Here are some ways to begin:

**“I know you are smart and know a lot of things. Perhaps you could help me with something that has been on my mind. I keep hearing about how much drinking is going on, and I am a little worried. Maybe if we talked about it I might feel better. Do you mind giving me a few minutes?”**

**“You probably have already heard a lot in school about drinking alcohol. I would like to talk with you a little about it. I know things are different from when I was young and I would not be a good parent if I chose not to talk with you about something so important. Do you mind giving me a few minutes?”**

Teens are often tired after a school day or athletic event, and that may not be the best time to start a conversation. Think about your teen's schedule and how you can create a time where you will have his or her undivided attention. Perhaps take him or her out to a quiet dinner or someplace where you can comfortably start a “one-on-one” conversation.



## TIP:

Here are several topics that we recommend you discuss with your child

TOPIC	HOW	WHAT	WHY
The effect of drinking on the body / physically	<i>"How" do you think drinking helps or hurts the body?</i>	<i>"What" physical activities do you want to do in the future that drinking could hurt?</i>	<i>"Why" do you think some young people drink if they can get hurt?</i>
How drinking affects decisions and choices	<i>"How" do you think drinking affects choices young people make?</i>	<i>"What" problems can happen when young people choose to drink?</i>	<i>"Why" do you think some young people drink if it can have a negative impact on their choices?</i>
Drinking before age 21	<i>"How" does drinking before the age of 21 affect someone?</i>	<i>"What" answers could kids give if they're pushed to drink before 21?</i>	<i>"Why" do you think some people would start drinking before 21?</i>

**Remember: Try to keep your cool and not get angry if you hear things that you don't like.**

## STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Communication is most effective when all participants have a feeling of connection and collaboration. The best way to achieve this is by asking for permission. For example, you might say, “There is something that I have been hearing about lately in the news and I was hoping we could talk about it for a few minutes. Is that okay?” When the time is right to start talking together, use “*how*,” “*what*,” and “*why*” questions to help your son or daughter work through different scenarios that could involve alcohol.

### *Here are some strong ways to start a dialogue around alcohol:*

- I know that some high school students have tried alcohol. I was wondering...
- If you were to guess, how many kids your age do you think have had a drink with alcohol in it or been a passenger in a car where the driver was drinking?
- How do you think it has helped them? Hurt them?
- What are the reasons those kids might have had for drinking?
- What are some of the things they could have done instead?
- Why do you think they did that?
- Why do you think they didn’t drink?

These are different than yes-or-no questions like “do you know anyone who drinks?” Questions that start with “*how*,” “*what*,” and “*why*” can encourage an exchange of ideas. They help teens practice rational thinking about pros and cons of different alternatives. Open-ended questions allow kids to develop thinking skills that help them resist in-the-moment emotions. You can also personalize the questions: “If you were in their situation how might you act? *How* do you think it would affect you? *What* are some of the things you could have done instead? *Why* is that?”

### *Negative reactions from a parent can shut down communication and make it difficult to help a child solve problems and deal with difficult situations. Negative parental reactions include:*

- Letting off steam in an angry outburst.
- Giving the silent treatment and then saying “things are fine.”
- Bringing up the child’s past failures.
- Recruiting other people to support your side of the argument.
- Comparing kids and asking “why can’t you be more like your brother/sister?”

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## WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

Parents sometimes hesitate to impose rules against underage drinking or even to discuss drinking with their teens. Maybe they are embarrassed or assume their son or daughter is not at risk.

Are You Making That Assumption?	Read the Real Facts:
<b><i>My son or daughter is not interested in drinking.</i></b>	<i>According to data from a Monitoring the Future national survey, about 75% of teens try alcohol outside the home before graduating from high school.</i>
<b><i>My teen's friends are good kids who do not drink alcohol.</i></b>	<i>About 33% of high school seniors have consumed alcohol in the past 30 days.</i>
<b><i>My son or daughter has learned about the negative effects of alcohol in school.</i></b>	<i>Although most teens do learn about alcohol in their health classes, research shows that many important issues never get covered. School programs alone are not enough to stop teens from drinking.</i>
<b><i>At this point, my son or daughter should know better.</i></b>	<i>Unfortunately, the reality is that many teens at this point in their lives are still uninformed about how powerful a drug alcohol can be.</i>
<b><i>My son or daughter won't listen to me at this point.</i></b>	<i>Leading national surveys reveal that parents are the number one source that teens turn to for important information. Parents can influence their teen's decision not to drink alcohol.</i>

## ***Teens Make Assumptions, Too***

*Teens who binge drink say:*

- They don't believe drinking makes you sick or has bad effects.
- They are bored and there is nothing else to do but drink.
- They expect drinking to have benefits, such as improved socializing.
- "It can't be that bad if everyone is doing it," and "my friends won't think I'm cool if I don't drink."

Talk with your teen to correct his or her mistaken assumptions about alcohol. For example, six out of seven teens actually do NOT binge drink; educate your teen that not everyone is drinking though it may seem at times as though they are.

## ***Teens Drink Differently***

Teens often engage in intense drinking, called "binge" drinking. For males, bingeing means having at least five drinks at one time.

For females, bingeing means at least four drinks at a time. Unfortunately, nearly 22% of high school teens have engaged in binge drinking. Colleges report rates as high as 60%.

Sometimes, teens plan to binge (saying, for example, "Let's get hammered!"). Other times, they get caught up with drinking games or parties that get out of hand.

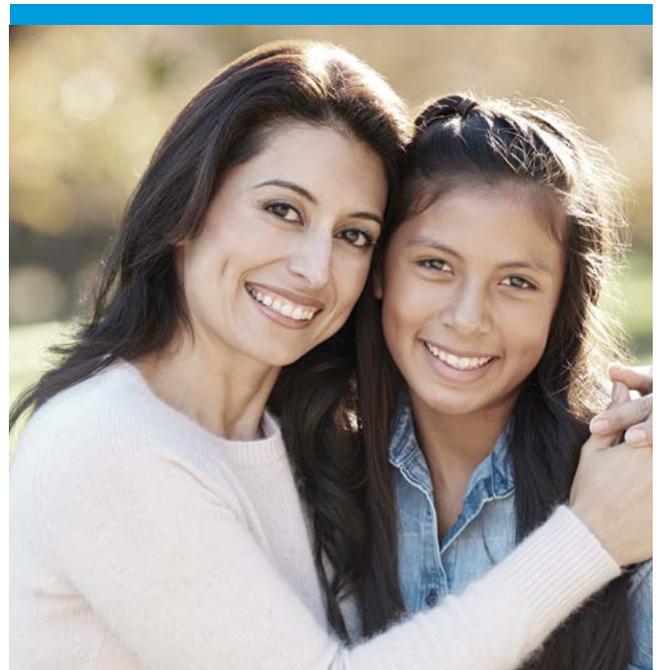
**Teens who chug alcohol and drink as much as they can—as fast as they can—risk dying from alcohol poisoning.**

*Consider these quotes from teens:*

*"A girl I know got so drunk that a friend and I had to carry her for several blocks, trying to keep her from burning us with a cigarette. Since then, she has gotten as drunk every weekend. It has gotten her into some bad situations."*

*"I was having a great night. I drank at least 15 beers. Then I blacked out. This is not unusual for me. Another time, I became violent, smashed bottles and got in tons of trouble."*

These accounts sound shocking, but your son, daughter, or someone they know has likely experienced something like this.



*In the past month:*

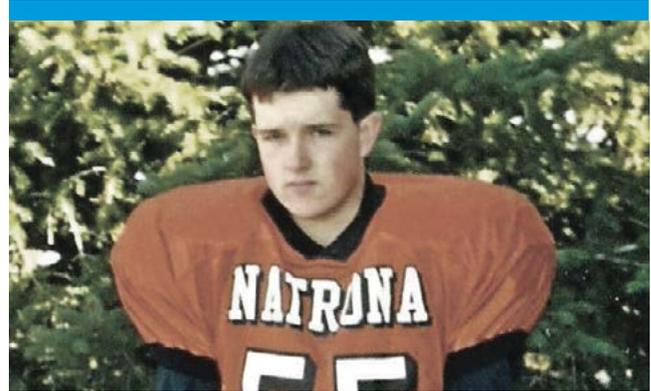
- 1 out of 10 students in the 10th grade got drunk.
- 1 out of 5 students in the 12th grade got drunk.

### Binge Drinking is Bad News

***Binge drinkers are more likely to be:***

- Pushed, hit, or attacked
- Confronted with unwanted sexual advances
- Sexually assaulted
- Seriously injured

Binge drinkers are also more likely to drive drunk, ride with a drunk driver, have their property damaged, have unprotected sex, and get exposed to sexually transmitted diseases.



#### ***Talk Soon***

“Casey was a senior, on the wrestling team, played football and sang in the choir. He and his friends bought some liquor from a store known for not checking IDs. They thought it would be fun to see how much one person could chug – that person was Casey. The next day, he was dead from alcohol poisoning. I had the false sense of security that he had the maturity of someone who could handle his liquor, but I was wrong.

***If I had it all to do over again? I would have made my message very clear.***

When I found that bottle of rum Casey had hidden in my garage, I would not have thrown it away and said nothing like I did. I would have taken it out and set it on my kitchen counter.

Then we would have discussed why I did not want him drinking, sitting there and looking at each other. I would have spoken to him about alcohol more often.”

***Story of a mother whose son died from alcohol poisoning at the age of 18.***

## KNOWING THE FACTS AS YOU COMMUNICATE YOUR FAMILY'S VALUES

Families take different approaches to alcohol use. Some parents permit their teen to drink a controlled amount of alcohol under supervision on holidays or at family functions. Other parents don't permit any alcohol at all before a child reaches the age of 21.

We have met parents who teach basic family values, like honesty and responsibility, but never discuss alcohol directly with their kids. They assume that their son or daughter will know how to apply family values to alcohol and other drugs. That's a risky assumption. Teens' brains are not fully developed and don't make the same connections that are more obvious to adults.

You will empower your teen to meet the challenges of growing up if you explicitly discuss your expectations about alcohol, impaired driving, and riding with others who have been drinking. Keep communication lines open, and work together to set clear rules and consequences.

**We have met parents who teach basic family values, like honesty and responsibility, but never discuss alcohol directly with their kids.**

### **The science is clear about young people and alcohol and other drugs:**

Early alcohol and other drug use puts the developing brain at risk and substantially increases the risk of problems, victimization, and addiction. Kids whose parents allow them to drink at home drink more often and heavily outside the home. There are no studies showing benefits of letting children or teens try alcohol. Actually, it is the opposite: for health and safety of a child and teen, the only real safe level of alcohol use under the age of 21 is no alcohol use.

### ***MADD urges you to make the following agreements with your teen:***

- No drinking alcohol before age 21
- No socializing in places where teens are drinking
- No riding in a car with a driver who has had any amount of alcohol
- No other drugs

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Consider research from the United States and Europe: these studies show that teens who are given alcohol at home are more likely to drink alcohol when they are away from their parents. They also get drunk more often at early ages. It is very important to discuss all four highly risky behaviors.

### The Bottom Line

Teens who believe their parents approve of them drinking alcohol are more likely to drink outside the home, drive impaired, and ride with other drivers who are impaired.

Teens are young and still learning about behaving responsibly. You can help your teen find many other ways to practice responsible behavior besides drinking alcohol or using other drugs.

As a parent, don't feel the pressure to give in and let your teen drink before the age of 21. The science is clear that being permissive does not improve the relationship between a parent and a teen, but rather negatively affects it.

Also keep in mind: there can be legal ramifications to serving alcohol to your own child or other people's children. In some states, parents may serve their own children alcohol. Adults, however, are never permitted to serve alcohol to other people's children. What's more, it is illegal for young people under 21 to purchase or possess alcohol.

## ENFORCING CONSEQUENCES

As a parent, be ready to follow through and enforce consequences if your teen violates a family agreement. Permissive parents do not enforce consequences, but positive parents do, and the science about which style helps children and teens is clear and without exceptions.

*Discuss your position on alcohol and other drugs, impaired driving, and riding in a car with a driver that has been drinking or using other drugs:*

- How you expect your teen will behave and why you take that position.
- Consequences you will enforce if the teen fails to live up to those expectations.
- Establishing consequences in advance appropriate to the violation. It's best if your teen has no surprises if he or she breaks the agreement.

### Do

- Impose a consequence if your teen violates an agreement.
- Impose consequences consistently.
- Be very clear about no underage drinking.

### Don't

- Base your actions on anger.
- Impose a consequence arbitrarily, in the heat of the moment.

### ***Here are examples:***

A teen comes home from a party and has clearly been drinking. The parent is angry and says, “You’re grounded indefinitely. When you’re not in school, you will be at home.” This consequence is set arbitrarily in the heat of the moment and may not even be possible to enforce.

Another way the parent might respond would be to say, “I’m very disappointed with you. We had agreed that there would be no drinking until you are 21. We will talk about this in the morning.”

The next day, the parent might say, “As you know, you violated a very important family rule. Drinking is very dangerous for you. Therefore, as we agreed before, there will be serious consequences. For the next month, you

will not be allowed to use the family car and your curfew will be 9:00 instead of 11:00. I hope that after the month has passed, we will both feel more confident in your ability to follow the rules of this family.”

In this example, the consequences were previously established and are discussed after the parent’s initial disappointment in the teen has subsided.

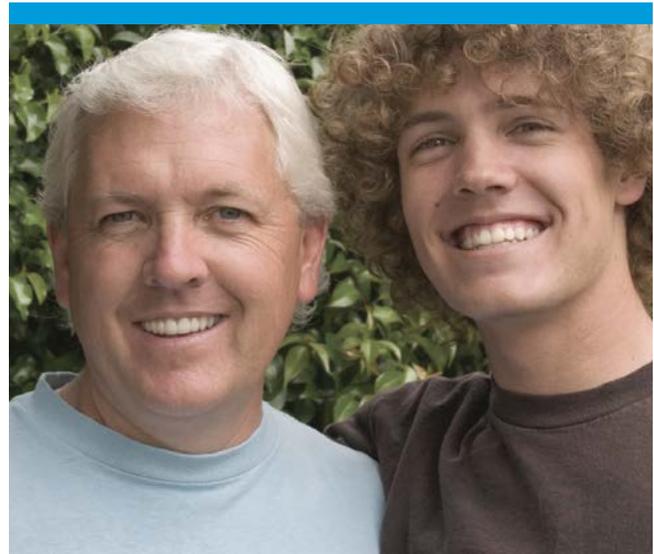
**Emphasize to teens how quickly drinking can lead to dangerous results. That’s why you take underage drinking so seriously.**

### **Does the Penalty Fit?**

***It’s best for consequences to match the “crime.”***

Small violations of family rules deserve mild punishment; serious violations deserve tougher penalties. For example, you could consider curbing a teen’s privileges, like driving, curfew, phone rights, or computer access.

Evaluate the situation, and as a parent, set an appropriate consequence.



### ***High Quality Agreements***

A good agreement is clear and understood by all. However, parents and teens often make agreements only to have the teen break them. Instead of being a true agreement, the agreement really imposes what the parent wants.

At times, you may have to ask for an agreement based on respect for your authority. In those cases, emphasize that your purpose is to protect and your intent is to eventually give freedom.

Agreements are most likely to be honored when they are made in the context of high-quality relationships. High quality relationships are built on mutual trust, where both participants are confident that the other will be honest, responsible, and caring.

#### ***High quality relationships are characterized by:***

- Respect for one another.
- Empathy and understanding.
- Knowledge of each other.
- Mutual trust.
- Concern for one another.

### **TIP**

Even if your teen says what you hope to hear (“I don’t drink”), it’s still important to talk together about alcohol. Ask questions, listen without defensiveness, and expand your teen’s thinking. Discuss how he or she might handle or avoid risky situations that could come up.

***Your teen may not admit to drinking yet, but you can still set no-alcohol rules.***

Talk together about alcohol to help prevent your teen from drinking underage.



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## DID YOU DRINK WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG?

Your son or daughter will probably ask if you ever drank as a teen. This creates a dilemma. If you drank and say “no,” you are being dishonest. If you say “yes,” your child will think you are hypocritical to expect different behavior from them.

Honesty is important and you should not lie to your teen. Parents use different approaches to answer this question:

### ***Making the topic off limits.***

Some parents establish a “ground rule” at the start of their discussion: they will talk about everything else, but will not answer questions about their own use of drugs or alcohol as a teen. The parent explains that the parent’s behavior as a teen is not relevant to the teen’s current use of alcohol. This strategy works in some families, but not in others. Teens usually become convinced that their parents are hiding something and resent that their parents won’t talk about it.

### ***Admitting mistakes and emphasizing negative outcomes.***

Other parents admit they drank as teens, but focus on how it was a mistake. They use their own experience to discuss negative outcomes, such as how drinking led to an embarrassing moment or dangerous situation. They stress that because the parent behaved foolishly and was lucky enough to escape serious consequences does not mean that the teen will have the same outcome.

Here is an example of how you might handle this question:

**“I did have a drink when I was younger. However, we did not know as much as we know now about the risks of alcohol. If I had known then, I would have done things differently. This is why I am talking to you about it. I want you to be safe, healthy, and happy.”**

### ***Underage Drinkers Tend to Binge Drink***

- Underage drinkers behave differently than most adult drinkers.
- Adults typically have a drink or two with a meal or at a party. Teens drink less frequently, but tend to consume larger quantities than adults.

## The Physical Effects of Alcohol

Alcohol is a drug that depresses the entire body.

***From the first drink, alcohol begins to impair judgment, coordination, and reaction time.***

As higher levels of alcohol reach the brain, physical processes slow down, including breathing and heart rate. Too much alcohol makes breathing and heart rate drop to dangerously low levels—or even stop.

## TALKING SO YOUR TEEN WILL LISTEN

The following strategies will help you communicate most effectively:

### ***Listen.***

Allow the teen to speak without interruption. Listen to what he or she says. Sometimes, it is good to paraphrase. “Let me see if I understand you. It sounds like you feel that...” With paraphrasing, you don’t agree or disagree, you interpret.

**Most teens say their parents are the leading influence on their decisions about drinking**

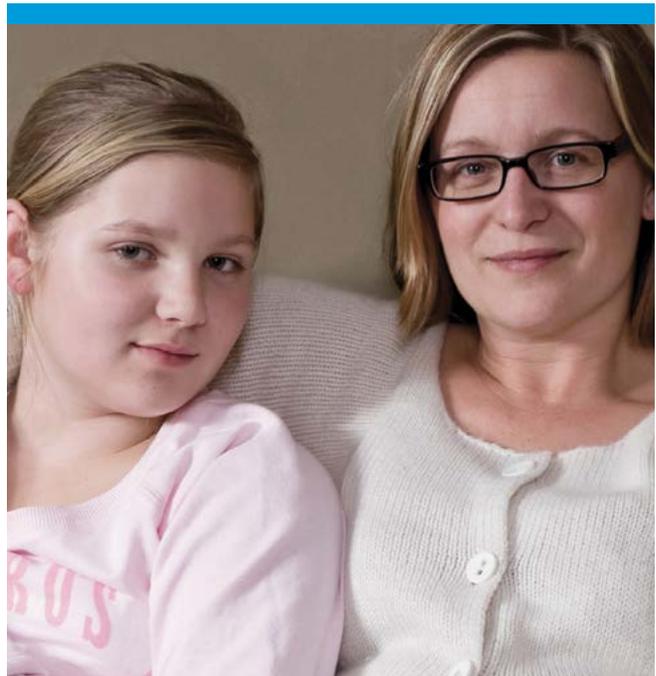
### ***Speak with respect and appreciation.***

Your teen still values your approval. Whenever you can, express your respect and admiration (for example,

“I admire what you have done and how you are coping”). Everyone wants to be respected and is more willing to talk to people who respect them. Tell your son or daughter you are proud of them for being able to handle tough situations.

### ***Choose a good time.***

Choose the best time to bring up and discuss problems. Don’t do it when the other person is rushed or has a commitment elsewhere. Wait until you both can have a relaxed, calm discussion.



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You might take your child to lunch or out for some ice cream where you could both sit down to talk and listen to one another.

***Communicate directly.***

Pick a time to speak when you can have each other's undivided attention. Don't discuss important things when one of you is absorbed in another activity, such as reading the newspaper, watching television, or texting.

***Emphasize common goals.***

Remind teens that you are on their side. Emphasize common goals, and use the shared goals as a basis for your guidance and suggestions. (For example, remind your teen that you both want him or her to stay healthy and safe.)

***Avoid communication "stoppers."***

These are single statements that shut down any response. They are often threatening, such as "I better not catch you drinking or else."

***Recognize conflict is natural.***

We are not identical to one another. We all have different beliefs and values; therefore, disagreement is a natural thing. We can use conflict as an opportunity to grow and learn about each other.

***Agree to step away.***

Agree to temporarily stop talking if things don't go well. Wait until both individuals can talk in a calm, direct fashion.

***Use appropriate body language.***

How you position yourself physically while you talk can send important messages about your attitudes or express something you are not trying to convey. Don't look away or slouch down. Nod your head in agreement.

***Avoid debate.***

Sometimes a teen feels he or she must "defend" a position. Then the conversation turns into a mini-debate. If you find yourself debating, try suggesting that you both approach matters from a different angle.

Also, avoid statements that begin with "you" ("You did this..."). They make the other person feel attacked.

**Get Behind 21**

***Numerous studies show the 21 drinking age law has reduced underage drinking and saved thousands of lives.***

Research in the U.S. and Europe has never shown any benefit to drinking at a younger age or that teens could be safely "taught" to drink. On the contrary, they show that attempting to teach teens to drink results in increased binge drinking.

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## AVOIDING POTHOLES

Sometimes teens react badly when parents try to discuss sensitive topics. Here are ways to address their concerns. (Adapt them to your teen's personality as appropriate.)

### ***Fear of getting a lecture.***

Teens may be open to talking, but the last thing they want is a one-way lecture from parents about right and wrong. Studies show that teens drink more when they come from homes where parents are perceived to lecture too much.

**Teen:** "I know what you will do if we talk. You'll lecture me like you always do. Then if I argue you will interrupt me."

**Parent:** "You're right. This time I won't lecture. I will listen to what you think."

### **Keep It Constructive!**

**Do your best to keep communication channels open. Most of all, be constructive in your responses to your teen, not defensive or angry.**

### ***Anger about not being trusted.***

Some teens interpret a request to talk as a sign that you do not trust them.

Reassure your son or daughter that you are not suspicious and are doing this to help them, not attack them.

### ***Emphasize these themes:***

- Your **CARING** about the teen
- Wanting to **UNDERSTAND** the teen
- Wanting to **HELP** the teen
- **RESPECTING** the teen's privacy and desire to be independent



**Teen:** “What’s the matter, don’t you trust me?”

**Parent:** “I trust you. But this is a very important issue, and I think we need to pool the information we know to make sure you deal with everything effectively and that you know what to expect and what to do. To do that, we need to talk to each other.”

### ***Fear of punishment.***

Teens may fear you’ll treat them harshly right from the start. Teens who fear punishment communicate less often with their parents. Studies show these teens tend to initiate drinking, drink more often, and are more likely to experience alcohol-related consequences.

**Teen:** “Sure, talk with you and you won’t let me go out. Forget it.”

**Parent:** “I promise that I won’t be that way. I will listen to you. I’ll take what you say seriously. I’ll be straight with you and you be straight with me.”

### ***He/she thinks they already know it all.***

Some teens don’t want to talk because they believe they already know everything there is to know about a topic.

**Studies show that when teens feel they can trust their parents and are trusted by them, they are less likely to drink.**

Teens may think they know everything, but they often do not. Don’t let this objection stop you from trying to communicate.

**Teen:** “I’ve heard it all before. We don’t need to talk.”

**Parent:** “You probably already know quite a bit. It would make me feel better if we talked it through. Besides, it would help me to better understand how things are different from when I was your age.”

Studies show that when teens feel they can trust their parents and are trusted by them, they are less likely to drink.



## Get Behind Zero Tolerance Laws

Zero tolerance laws reinforce the minimum drinking age. They make it illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to drive with a measurable amount of alcohol in their blood (a BAC of higher than .00 to .02, depending on the specific law).

***Zero tolerance laws can make teens automatically lose their license for underage drinking violations. Avoiding this penalty can motivate young people who value the privilege of driving.***

Encourage your public safety officials to actively enforce these laws in your community. Zero tolerance laws reduce traffic deaths of young people.

Learn more online at: [madd.org](http://madd.org) / [powerofparents](http://powerofparents)

## STRATEGIES THAT HELP A TEEN SUCCEED

Teens are less likely to drink alcohol when their parents:

### ***Empower choices.***

Encourage teens to make their own choices, even relatively minor ones, such as picking a place for the family dinner, choosing a movie to go see, and so on. Sometimes choices can be framed by the parent in ways that the teen is choosing between two desirable alternatives.

### ***Give calm guidance.***

Offer clear-headed discussion and guidance about choices teens face that are important to their life path.

### ***Respect their concerns, even when maintaining limits.***

Respect teens' urge for independence. However, it is still important to set clear rules against alcohol use and know where your teens are.

### ***Phase in freedoms and challenges.***

Gradually reduce parental control so teens have more freedom and responsibility with each passing year—yet maintain limits against underage drinking.

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## 5 REASONS THAT TEENS RESPECT

When you speak with your son or daughter about avoiding alcohol, emphasize the following reasons that make many teens choose not to drink:

### ***Reason 1: Underage Drinking is Illegal***

Most teens know it is illegal to drink under the age of 21. Still, they may assume they won't get caught or they are unfamiliar with Zero Tolerance laws, which prohibit driving after drinking any amount of alcohol. Remind your son or daughter that police do receive complaints about parties. When police arrive, they may arrest all who have been drinking underage.

State clearly that you expect your teen to obey the law. Discuss the potential consequences for breaking the law, such as the teen could have his or her license revoked or face expensive legal fees. The teen, you, and your family could be publicly embarrassed, since these arrests are routinely reported in newspapers. If a court date is scheduled, you may have to take time off from work and could lose pay.

Teens rarely consider all the possible legal consequences. Discussing the implications of an arrest can help deter underage drinking.

### ***Reason 2: Drinking Can Make You Sick or Pass Out***

Alcohol irritates the lining of the digestive system. Drinking too much alcohol can make people vomit and feel bad for days (a condition known as a "hangover"). Other teens don't want to be around someone who is sick or passes out from too much drinking. Remind your teen that alcohol sickness can happen suddenly and with little warning.

### ***Reason 3: Drinking Can Lead to Sexual Assault***

Teens who are drinking are more vulnerable to dangerous situations and often can't escape or protect themselves from the threat of rape or assault.

*Research clearly shows that the younger a person starts drinking, the greater the chance they will develop alcohol problems later in life.*

## **CAUTION: Terrifying your teen could backfire**

Be truthful with your teen about risks, but avoid overly harsh scare tactics. Too much scary information can make people "turn off" and not pay as much attention. Plus, if you paint a horrific picture of the consequences and your teen doesn't see them happen immediately when someone they know drinks, they will assume you were wrong or exaggerating.

Your teen probably trusts the people she or he is around, and you may trust them too, but alcohol can turn situations dangerous. Eighty-five percent of women who have been sexually assaulted were assaulted by someone they knew.

#### **Reason 4: Drinking Can Lead to Early Death**

Heavy drinking can damage the liver, kidneys, brain, and heart, all with serious long-term consequences.

However, even one night of heavy drinking can have life-changing results, including unprotected sex (which may lead to pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease), death from alcohol poisoning or choking on vomit, or car crashes that are fatal.

### **The Bottom Line**

The best approach is to discuss negative consequences in a straightforward and honest manner.



#### **Reason 5: Drinking Might Lead to Being an Alcoholic**

Most teens have negative images of alcoholics, and most do not want to become alcoholics. Yet they believe they can control their drinking and will not become alcoholics.

*Research clearly shows, however, that the younger a person starts drinking, the greater the chance they will develop alcohol problems later in life. Adults who started drinking at age 15 or 16 are five times more likely to be diagnosed with alcohol dependence as adults who started drinking after age 21.*

### **Coffee Doesn't Work!**

After you drink, the liver removes alcohol from your body and bloodstream. This process takes time and cannot be sped up. As a result, there is no proven way to make a person sober quicker.

#### **You can't get sober faster by:**

- Drinking coffee
- Exercising
- Eating food
- Getting fresh air
- Taking a cold shower

**Remind your teen: Never get in a car with a driver who is trying to sober up. Coffee and other methods just don't work.**

# Helping Your Teen Make Good Choices

The biggest reason why teens drink is peer pressure. A friend might directly suggest your child participate, saying “Let’s get drunk,” or your teen might assume everyone else is doing it and that it’s an acceptable thing to do.

**You can’t completely protect your son or daughter from peer pressure, but by teaching your teen to make good choices and by supervising and monitoring his or her activities, you can help shield your teen from the most dangerous situations.**

## DEALING WITH PEER PRESSURE

Sometimes, teens face situations where they are pressured to do something they would rather not do. For example, a friend might push your teen to have a drink when your son or daughter doesn’t want to.

### *Your teen might be told:*

- Come on, everyone has tried it.
- If you won’t drink with us, then why are you hanging out with us?
- It’s part of growing up.
- We drank once before, so what’s the problem now?
- You’ll have an incredible time if you do.
- Come on, take a drink. It will get you in the mood.
- You’ve been working too hard. You deserve to party.

Teens need ways to resist this pressure and rely on their own values, beliefs, and attitudes. You can suggest they use simple “one-liners” that remove the pressure without making a big scene or issue about it.

### *For example, your teen could respond simply:*

- “It’s just not for me; it’s not what I want.”
- “I don’t drink.”
- “No thanks.”

## TIP

**Let your teen know that not everyone their age is drinking. Teens often overestimate how many of their peers are drinking or have tried alcohol.**

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***Your teen might also consider:***

- Offering an alternative, like “I’d rather have soda.”
- Making an excuse, like “I have a test to study for tomorrow.”
- Having an explanation, like “I really just don’t like the taste.”
- Changing the subject.

Encourage your teen to think of short, yet effective, responses. If your teen decides on “one-liners” beforehand, he or she will be prepared for an uncomfortable situation that might arise.

**It’s a fact**

**Anyone who has been drinking cannot accurately tell how drunk he or she is.**

## FINDING ALTERNATIVES TO DRINKING

Some teens have “positive” reasons (from their perspective) for why they might choose to drink. Help teens think of other ways to achieve similar goals.

***Positive reason: Celebrate***

Some teens believe that drinking helps celebrate a special occasion.

***Alternatives:***

Encourage your teen to find other ways to celebrate positively. Options might be:

- Shopping for something special (e.g., clothes, music, sporting goods).
- Having an outing, such as dinner, that would include a few special friends.
- Offering to have friends over for a party (without alcohol).



### **Positive reason: Lower Stress**

Some teens believe alcohol helps reduce worries.

#### **Alternatives:**

Remind the teen that a problem does not go away because you drink (and, in fact, it may become worse). Help your teen find productive ways to confront problems directly, rather than avoid them.

### **Positive reason: Express Feelings and Reduce Inhibitions**

Some teens believe that alcohol or other drugs will help make it easier to express feelings or talk with members of the opposite sex.

#### **Alternatives:**

Acknowledge how difficult certain social situations are for teens. But remind your teen that while alcohol might make him or her feel less shy, drinking actually clouds judgment. In addition, alcohol often confuses communication and leads to unwanted sexual advances, arguments, and sometimes fights.

### **Keep Track of Your Teen**

Ask your teen where he or she is going to be, especially on weekends.

***Have your teen check in periodically through the day and keep you informed.***

While you cannot ban a friend, you can limit contact with friends who strongly pressure your teen to drink or engage in other dangerous behaviors.

### **Parent-Child Connections Help Your Teen Stay Safe!**

#### **Research shows that the more you connect with your kids...**

- By having dinner together
- By talking together
- By enjoying activities
- By sharing feelings and concerns  
...the more protected your kids are against alcohol and other drug use.

### **Positive reason: Go Along with Friends**

Your son or daughter may feel pressured to drink or do other drugs. This pressure can be direct, like when someone hands him or her a beer at a party, or it can be indirect, like when he or she wants to be part of a group that experiments with alcohol.

#### **Alternatives:**

Parents can try to influence who their kids pick for friends, but parents cannot choose their kids' friends. Instead, help your teen understand the dynamics of peer pressure and how important it is to be his or her own person. Also, help your son or daughter plan how to react to situations where they could get pressured to drink, such as a friend bringing alcohol to a party.

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### **Positive reason: Fit In**

Even when peer pressure is not obvious, teens may feel that without drinking, they won't be seen as a true part of the group.

#### **Alternatives:**

Emphasize to your teen that “war stories”—like who drank the most shots, who blacked out, and who had the worst hangover—only highlight the dangers of drinking. Encourage your teen to focus on his or her own values and to overlook boasting about drinking and drunkenness.

**Parents can try to influence who their kids pick for friends, but parents cannot choose their kids' friends.**

### **Positive reason: Lift Mood**

Many teens believe that alcohol or other drugs will help them get in a better mood.

#### **Alternatives:**

Reassure your teen that it is normal to feel sad and stressed at times. Explain that it's possible to improve their mood without alcohol or other drugs. Exercise is an excellent way to help improve mood.

Also note to your son or daughter that the “high” from alcohol is accompanied by extreme lows as well.

### **Positive reason: Something to Do**

Some teens get bored and turn to alcohol as a means of entertaining themselves.

#### **Alternatives:**

Encourage your teen to get involved in sports, hobbies, music, dance, games, reading, and school clubs. He or she could volunteer with organizations associated with causes they care about, such as protecting the environment, preventing drinking and driving, or promoting literacy.

Teens often go to parties as a means of entertainment. Since drinking frequently occurs at parties, it's a good idea to monitor and set limits about the kinds of parties your child attends (including leaving a party where alcohol is served). Suggest ways teens can enjoy themselves without alcohol or other drugs.



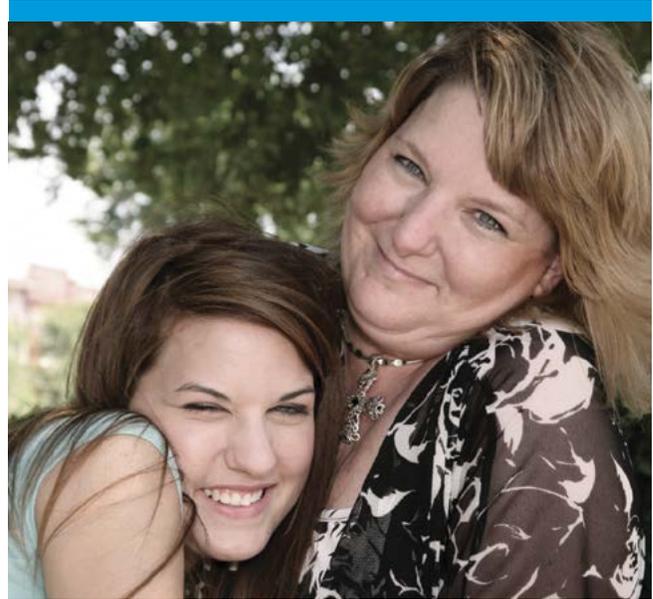
## CHOOSING FRIENDS

Friendships are very important to teens, and teens typically spend more and more time with friends. Parents need to know who their teens are spending time with and what their teens are doing on a daily basis. You can also encourage your teen to have healthy friendships.

**Talk with your teen about the true meaning of friendship. True friendship is not based on superficial things like money, looks, popularity, or being with someone who is “cool.”**

True friendship is based on mutual respect, caring, understanding, trust, and concern. Real friends want to keep their friends safe and well. When you discuss the meaning of friendship together, you’ll help your teen think about choices. You can also help your teen avoid risky choices by monitoring his or her activities.

**Keep tabs on your son or daughter to help your teen avoid dangerous, high-risk situations.**



### Teach Good Problem Solving

***Help your teen practice these problem-solving skills:***

- Notice a problem.
- Identify possible actions that might solve the problem.
- Gather information about the pros and cons of each possible action.
- Carefully examine the pros and cons, and select one option that seems best.
- Carry through on the decision.

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***Do you worry that your teen is hanging around with the wrong crowd?***

Monitor social activities and supervise parties. Before your teen attends a social event, contact the host teen's parents to make sure that the party will be supervised by adults and won't involve alcohol or other dangerous behaviors.

***Don't ban a friend.***

If your teen has a friend you disapprove of, possibly the worst thing to do is forbid your teen from seeing that friend. Teens value their friendships highly and defend friends strongly. If you directly attack a friend, your son or daughter will feel compelled to defend the friend and explain all of the "good" features of the friendship. A better strategy is to include the friend you disapprove of in some family activities. Then you get a chance to know the friend and share your family values.

***Encourage more friends.***

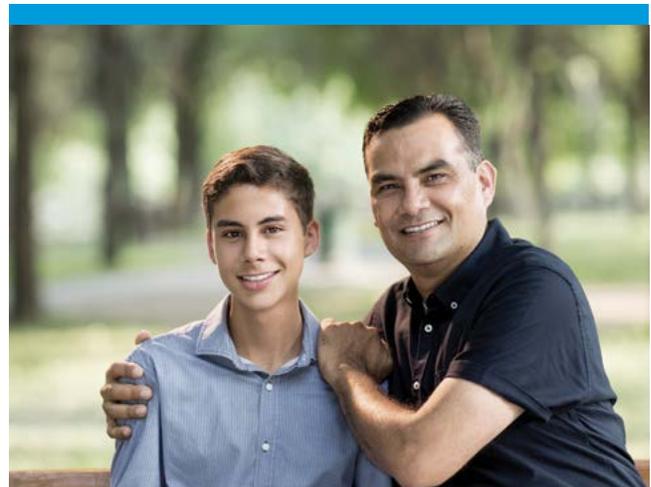
Encourage your son or daughter to participate in after-school programs, religious functions, or community centers where they can meet other teens with appropriate values. Making more friends helps prevent undue influence by a single "bad" friend.

***Help teens avoid high-risk group situations.***

The most dangerous situations for teens are unsupervised group activities and parties. Teens find it especially tough to stand up against a group of friends pushing him or her to do something illegal, like drink alcohol. That's why it's so important to monitor your teen's activities and make sure he or she avoids these high-risk settings. Also, discuss ways your teen can resist peer pressure to prepare for dangerous situations that might arise.

**TIP**

**More Teens, More Risk**  
Teens find it hard to resist peer pressure, especially in a group. Help your teen steer clear of trouble by monitoring his or her activities.



## STEERING CLEAR OF DRIVING DANGERS

It is illegal for teens to drink alcohol, and it is illegal for teens to drink any amount of alcohol and drive.

An underage drinker might not feel tipsy or drunk and decide it's okay to drive after drinking. However, this is extremely dangerous. Even with small amounts of alcohol, teen drivers are more likely to be in a crash than older drivers after drinking.

### *Drinking and Driving*

Most teens have a “here and now” perspective. They need your help to understand all of the short-term and long-term consequences of driving under the influence.

## TIP

Coach your teen about roadway hazards and safe driving principles. Ride in the car together and see how your teen is driving. Driver education classes are just the beginning.

Discuss the Possible Outcomes	
<i>Legal outcomes</i>	<i>Physical Outcomes</i>
<i>Being charged with purchasing, having, or drinking alcohol underage; being charged with driving under the influence</i>	<i>Damage to car or other's car</i>
<i>Fines</i>	<i>Damage to property or other's property</i>
<i>Car insurance rates could go up (unaffordable insurance may then prevent keeping a car)</i>	<i>Personal injury—from minor to life-altering—and/or injuring others</i>
<i>Reduced college options, due to admission policies; suspension from sports or clubs</i>	<i>Sexual assault, unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases</i>
<i>Alcohol citation may stay on legal record, depending on local regulations (For a list of laws in your state, visit <a href="http://madd.org">madd.org</a>)</i>	<i>Death—of you, someone you love and/or another person</i>
<i>License could be revoked / Jail time</i>	

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Teens who don't consider all the consequences are more likely to drink and drive. Since teens pay most attention to short-term consequences, parents need to set clear no-alcohol use rules and enforce consequences.

### *Riding with an Impaired Driver*

Someday your teen may be faced with deciding whether or not to ride in a car with an individual who has been drinking. Emphasize to your teen that getting in a car with any impaired driver is extremely dangerous.

Set a clear family rule: No riding with any driver under the age of 21 who has been drinking.

### Wrong Message?

Some parents worry that offering a ride home could send the wrong message and make teens believe it's okay to drink alcohol.

*Even if you offer a ride home, you can still enforce previously established consequences for breaking the no-alcohol rule.*

Assure your teen that safety is the first priority. When teens have good communication with their parents and trust that their parents won't overreact (by getting angry and setting harsh or unknown punishments), teens are more likely to call home for help.



## Alcohol is More Dangerous for Young Drivers

Young drivers are at greater risk for crashing than adult drivers, even with low levels of alcohol in the blood.

- Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens (15-20 years old), and 31% of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related.
- One in 10 teens in high school drinks and drives.
- One in 5 teen drivers involved in fatal crashes had some alcohol in their system in 2010. Most of these drivers (81%) had BACs higher than the legal limit for adults.

Discuss with your teen the danger of riding with anyone who may have had too much to drink. Help your teen make a plan in case he or she experiences an unsafe situation. Talk about effective alternatives, such as calling a taxi or asking someone else for a ride home.

Remind your teen that drinking coffee or other techniques for “sobering up” don’t actually work. He or she should not rely on these techniques to make a friend a “safe and sober” driver.

Encourage teens to call if they need a safe ride home.

When your teen calls you to pick him or her up because either he or she or someone else has been drinking:

1. Pick up your teen and get him or her home safely. Be calm and not angry on the way home.
2. If the established household rule has been broken, pick the soonest appropriate time to discuss consequences with your teen. It may be best to wait until the next day.
3. Talk again about the rules and consequences. You only want to keep him or her safe from harm.

### *Tips for Keeping Teens Safe on the Road*

MADD recommends that parents make clear rules about driving to help keep their teens safe. In particular, parents should become familiar with the provisions of graduated licensing and zero tolerance laws in their state and firmly enforce those rules.

## Graduated Drivers License (GDL) Laws

Each state offers a type of graduated drivers licensing that phases in privileges for new drivers.

***GDL is an important public safety tool; it prevents about one in five crashes for teen drivers.***

Learn the GDL laws in your state, and make sure that your teen is obeying them.

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These laws typically set night driving restrictions for young drivers and set limits on passengers. Both of these rules are very important to the safety of teen drivers.

***Take the following steps shown to help keep teens safe:***

- Set no-alcohol use rules.
- Tell your teen to always buckle up in all seats of the car.
- Tell your teen to slow down and respect the speed limit.
- Do not allow your teen to make phone calls or send text messages while driving. The best way to prevent this activity is to have your phone off while driving.
- Limit the number of passengers allowed in the car when your teen is driving.
- Limit nighttime and weekend driving for your teen.
- Set curfews on the time your teen needs to be home to limit the amount of risk.
- Know where your teen is by monitoring his or her activities.

## **COULD YOUR TEEN HAVE A DRINKING PROBLEM?**

Your teen could already be drinking, and even have a drinking problem, if 1) alcohol is missing from bottles or cans in your home, or 2) you've discovered alcohol hidden in your teen's backpack, car, or room. Your teen may have a problem with alcohol if he or she is:

- Using breath mints or mouthwash heavily—

these may be an attempt to mask the odor of alcohol.

- More sluggish and passive than usual, and doesn't care as much about former interests or appearance.
- Unusually aggressive or rebellious.
- Hanging around with different friends and is more secretive than usual.
- Struggling with grades or skipping school.
- Borrowing money more often.
- Acting drunk and intoxicated, stumbling or moving awkwardly, slurring speech and has a dull, unfocused look or bloodshot eyes.

### ***Do***

- Discuss the problem calmly with your son or daughter.
- Explain that you are concerned and willing to help.
- Stay awake when your teen stays out late, when possible, and show you are interested in what they are doing.
- Seek professional help to handle this situation.

### ***Don't***

- Take over your teen's responsibilities. Instead, provide him or her with the means to take responsibility for himself or herself.
- Argue with your son or daughter if she or he is drunk.
- Make excuses or cover up for your son or daughter.

**If you think your son or daughter might have a drinking problem, do not turn your back on the problem.**

# Talking About Marijuana, and Combining Alcohol and Marijuana

*Next to alcohol, marijuana is the most misused drug among youth. According to published studies:*

- By the age of 20, approximately 50% of youth have used marijuana in their lifetimes. This is 2-3 times more than either younger individuals or older individuals.
- When recent marijuana use is examined, 1 in 5 of these individuals report using marijuana in the past month.
- Data shows that 1 in 3 youth who drink alcohol have also combined alcohol with marijuana on the same evenings. On these occasions, they tend to experience 2-3 times more problems compared to those evenings when they consume alcohol.

## HOW MARIJUANA WORKS IN THE BODY

Marijuana contains a chemical called tetrahydrocannabinol, commonly known as THC. When THC enters the brain by smoking, vaping, or eating edible marijuana (e.g., candy or brownie), it influences chemical reactions that create positive feelings or a “high.” While this is happening, marijuana is also altering normal communication inside the brain and between the brain and the rest of the body. These alterations can seriously affect movement and coordination, sensation, pain, emotions, judgment, decision-making, memory, and appetite.

## *Marijuana Yesterday and Today*

Prior to 1990, the THC content in marijuana was around 2-4%. In 2017, in states where there are stores that legally sell marijuana to the public, the THC content was approximately 28%. This means that the ***THC content between marijuana used in 1990 and today is 7-14 times stronger.***

If the strength of alcohol in beer increased in the same manner, having one beer today would be equal to having between 7-14 beers in 1990. Because of strong regulation, however, beer potency has changed very little over time, so a beer today raises the same effects as a beer did 30 years ago.

To put it simply, today’s marijuana is not the same drug as what many parents over the age of 40 might have experienced when they were young. The magnified strength in today’s marijuana results in magnified effects.

This is why health professionals are reporting marijuana use resulting in increased heart rate and bronchitis; cancer; anxiety; and sleep and fatigue. Regular or frequent use can also result in changes in brain function, mental illness (depression, schizophrenia), and addiction.

***Yes, today’s marijuana is highly addictive!***

**Last, but not least, studies have shown that the effects of marijuana on brain function cannot be reversed.**

## ***Marijuana and Youth***

Young people's brains continue to develop until their mid-20s. As a result, marijuana affects them differently than adults.

*Research has shown teens who use marijuana are more likely to report decreases in brain volume, poorer attention, verbal skills, and self-regulatory behaviors.*

***According to research, here are some of the reasons teens have told us why they use marijuana***

- To get more of a high (“cross-faded”)
- To relax or reduce stress.
- To counteract the effects of drinking (e.g., reduce spinning, vomiting, headache)
- Coping strategy (e.g., trouble in personal life)
- Social anxiety.
- Peer pressure: Friends combine alcohol and marijuana.
- To increase the effects of alcohol.
- It feels good.

***Not all teens use marijuana, and here are some reasons they told us they don't***

- To avoid greening out (where they get so high they pass out).
- Loss of control.
- Sick feeling (e.g., nausea, vomiting).
- It makes them feel anxious.

- It makes their heart race.
- It makes them feel paranoid.
- They have responsibilities.
- It makes them feel tired the next morning.
- It may lead to poor decisions.
- It makes it difficult to do well in school.
- Marijuana is illegal in ALL states for individuals under 21.



## Beliefs Students Sometimes Have About Marijuana That Are Not True

<i>Myth</i>	<i>Fact</i>
<b><i>Marijuana is safe</i></b>	<i>Marijuana is much stronger today than in the past. There is no way to determine a safe dosage (e.g., some vaping, a few bites of a brownie). There are also many different strains with different effects. This makes marijuana a high-risk drug to use.</i>
<b><i>Marijuana makes you a better driver</i></b>	<i>Studies have shown that, of seriously injured drivers admitted to trauma centers, more than 1 out of 4 tested positive for marijuana. In another study of fatally injured drivers in a western state, over 1 in 10 tested positive for marijuana.</i>
<b><i>You cannot get addicted to marijuana</i></b>	<i>Marijuana is currently the leading cause of substance dependence other than alcohol in the U.S. Studies show that marijuana accounts for over 50% of the 7 million people aged 12 or older dependent on or abusing a drug.</i>
<b><i>Marijuana is safer than alcohol</i></b>	<i>Both alcohol and marijuana are associated with significant problems. Comparing which is safer overlooks that there are serious risks associated with both drugs.</i>
<b><i>Marijuana has medicinal value</i></b>	<i>While marijuana is legal for medicinal purposes in some states, this is not the case in all states. In the states where it is legal for medicinal purposes, patients need to be under the care and supervision of a physician for specific diseases and ailments. Patients also need prescriptions that specify how much, how often, and in what form it can be used. Marijuana for medicinal purposes often contains other compounds or ingredients to help specific disorders. Lastly, marijuana is rarely prescribed for children under 18 for medicinal purposes.</i>
<b><i>Marijuana is legal</i></b>	<i>Again, while this is true in some states, it is not legal in all states. Further, there are no states where marijuana is legal for recreational use for individuals under 21 years of age.</i>

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## HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR TEEN

A common question we hear from parents is, “What can I do to help reduce the risks of my child getting hurt from drinking alcohol or combining alcohol and marijuana?” Below is a case study of a mother that many parents can relate to.

### ***A case study***

Teri has a son who is a senior high school student considering attending an out-of-state university. Her son is interested in video games and sports and volunteers in his community. Teri has talked to her son about drinking (and marijuana) since he was in middle school and continues to “check in” fairly regularly.

Teri and her husband are fairly typical parents. They prefer spending time with close friends and family on weekends while having dinner and drinks, but nothing ever out of hand and no marijuana use. In his senior year they allow their son to have a small glass of wine or a beer on very special occasions. Otherwise, drinking is not allowed or encouraged. Teri has heard about the heavy drinking that goes on at parties and is concerned like many parents, but feels that by keeping lines of communication open and talking to her son about the risks, she is doing all that she can. To the best of her knowledge, he avoids parties on weekends, but she knows there have been at least one or two occasions where he was out with friends where there was alcohol and marijuana.

The research shows there are many things that Teri does that will reduce the odds of Jeremy experiencing consequences associated with combined alcohol and marijuana use.

1. Research has shown that the more parents talk with their children about drinking and marijuana, the less likely they are to use them in combination and experience consequences.
2. Studies show parental modeling is associated with children’s drinking and marijuana use. Teri and her husband’s low use of alcohol and no marijuana use are protective and lower their son’s risk.
3. Studies show that it is never too late for parents to talk with their children about drinking and marijuana. The higher the quality the parent communication, the less likely their college-age children are to drink and use marijuana in combination and experience consequences. Teri’s checking in and continued conversations are protective and lower his risk.

***Turn to the next page for more things that Teri can do.***

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The research also shows there are additional things that Teri can do to reduce the odds of her son experiencing consequences associated with combined alcohol and marijuana use.

1. Studies show that when parents allow their high school children to have a small glass of wine or a beer on “special occasions,” they are likely to drink more often and in greater amounts when they are not with their parents. Unfortunately, the studies also indicated that the harm from letting their children drink even a little **could not be changed by** better parent communication, modeling, or monitoring. The impact on risk was the same no matter how good the parents were at communicating or how mature the children seemed to be.
2. These same studies show that allowing the use of alcohol on these special occasions is also related to combining alcohol and marijuana (and experiencing consequences). When Teri and her husband allow their son to drink on special occasions, **they may have unknowingly increased his risk** of combining alcohol and marijuana and experiencing consequences.
3. Research shows that use of alcohol before the age of 21 is a risk factor for alcohol and marijuana consequences. **One way for Teri to change her son’s risk** is to no longer allow him to drink during special occasions until he turns 21.

## PARENTAL CONCERNS

Teri did not realize the impact of allowing her son to drink on special occasions. Like most parents, Teri thought that by allowing him to have a small glass of wine or a beer on “special occasions” like families do in many European countries, she was teaching him adult values and moderation. Studies show this is not the case. In the U.S., there are fewer youth who experience problems associated with alcohol compared to European countries where the drinking age is lower than 21.

Based on Teri’s learning new information, she was willing to change and no longer allowed her son to drink during special occasions until he turns 21. When asked how her son might respond, she said he might protest (“you let me before, why now?”). She said she would let him know what she has learned and that she would not want to do something that would hurt him.

Teri also worried he might change and not be as open or honest with her. Interestingly, studies have shown that when parents explain to their children why they have changed their minds, their children are more open and honest compared to those whose parents allow their children to drink. While this seems a little counterintuitive, children are intelligent and they appreciate their parents’ honesty and concern for them.

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### ***Did you use marijuana when you were young?***

Like alcohol, parents differ in their experiences with marijuana when they were young. There are many different ways parents approach answering this question. Here are some examples of how to respond to this type of question:

*“If I knew what I know now, I would have made a lot of decisions differently, including not trying something at a party when I was younger that I might later regret.”*

After this, you could add...

*“I do know now that the data from studies show that the younger people are when they drink or smoke marijuana, the more likely they will have more frequent and more severe problems in their teens, 20s, and beyond.*

*I also know that the data also show that when parents think it is okay for their teens to drink or smoke once in a while, those teens drink/smoke more and have more problems in their lives.*

*Lastly, I know that studies show that on the occasions when students drink and smoke marijuana, they experience 2-3 times as many problems than on the occasions when they consume alcohol alone.*

*Being that there is more scientific information now than when I was your age, the more important thing is not what I did 15-20 years ago, but right now how I can help you from being in a situation where you could do something that hurts you or someone else. What do you think would be a good thing to do? How do you think that would work?”*

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Parents also often wonder about whether their children are listening and whether their conversations are making a difference. Studies repeatedly show that parents do make a difference with how they act, what they do and do not allow their children to do, how they listen and ask questions, and whether they tell their children what to do vs. asking them questions that allow the children to work through solutions to problems. Studies show that asking children questions that start with **how**, **what**, and **why** are the best ways to open the lines of communication or improve the impact of those conversations (such as, “How would you handle an invitation to go to a party where others are drinking and smoking marijuana? What are things you could do instead? Why might that work or not work?”).

**All the things you do make a difference and it is never too late to start making that difference in your child’s life.**

# Discussion Checklist

*Remember to cover these points when you talk with your teen:*

1. **Emphasize** the fact that drinking is illegal for teens and for very good reasons.
2. **Let your teen know** that not everyone their age is drinking. Teens often overestimate how many of their peers are drinking or have tried alcohol.
3. **Talk** about how drinking affects the brain. Teens need to know how drinking will affect them and that a person who is drinking is not a good judge of how impaired they are.
4. **Explain** your own position concerning your teen's drinking. Discuss your family's rules about alcohol and agree on the consequences for breaking the rules.
5. **Talk** about what sometimes motivates teens to drink, and discuss alternatives for achieving those goals.
6. **Discuss** reasons for NOT drinking and the many bad consequences that can result from drinking.
7. **Help** your teen brainstorm ways to resist inappropriate peer pressure. Reinforce that you want to help your son or daughter find constructive alternatives to drinking.

## Tell Your Teen

- "I care about you and want you to stay safe. That's why I need to know where you are."
- "You matter so much to me; that's why we need to talk about how risky alcohol and other drugs are."
- "I love you and want you to have the brightest future possible. That's why there's no drinking until you turn 21, no riding in the car with others who have been drinking or using other drugs, and no impaired driving."

**Remember, parents do matter. Have the conversation about alcohol and other drugs today.**

# Promoting A Safer Community

Even one parent can influence policy makers and enforcement agencies and help assure a safe and healthy environment. MADD urges you to get involved by taking the steps below.

## Step 1: *Support strong laws.*

Tell lawmakers that you support the 21 minimum drinking age and want to cut off teens' ability to obtain alcohol. Encourage programs that:

- Require registration and tracking of beer kegs.
- Support social host laws that penalize adults who host underage drinking parties.
- Limit new or renewed liquor licenses in your community.
- Support 21 minimum age purchase laws.

## Step 2: *Push for strong enforcement.*

Ask police officials and judges to actively enforce "zero tolerance" laws and programs that fight underage drinking. For example:

- After an underage drinker has a traffic crash, officials should find out how the youths got the alcohol and hold those parties accountable.
- Identify and penalize retailers that illegally sell alcohol to youth.
- Support sanctions against youth who attempt to purchase alcohol or who use fake IDs to purchase alcohol.

## Step 3: *Involve educators.*

Contact your schools and colleges and ask what they're doing to prevent underage drinking. When looking at college campuses with your teen, understand and question college policies on underage drinking to ensure your teen is safe.

## Step 4: *Hold advertisers accountable.*

When you see alcohol marketing that targets young people, complain and push to have that advertising removed.

**For more information, visit [madd.org/powerofparents](http://madd.org/powerofparents)**

## Get Behind 21

Numerous studies show the 21 drinking age law has reduced underage drinking and saved thousands of lives.

# Resources

## **MOTHERS AGAINST DRUNK DRIVING**

[madd.org/powerofparents](http://madd.org/powerofparents)

[madd.org/powerofyouth](http://madd.org/powerofyouth)

[powerofyouth.com](http://powerofyouth.com)

## **ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS**

[adultchildren.org](http://adultchildren.org)

## **CENTER FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION**

[samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)

## **CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION**

[cdc.gov/alcohol](http://cdc.gov/alcohol)

## **HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER FOR ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG PREVENTION**

[edc.org/body-work/substance-abuse-prevention-and-treatment](http://edc.org/body-work/substance-abuse-prevention-and-treatment)

## **NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE FOR ALCOHOL AND DRUG INFORMATION**

[samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)

## **NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE**

[ncadd.org](http://ncadd.org)

## **NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM**

[niaaa.nih.gov](http://niaaa.nih.gov)

## **PENN STATE UNIVERSITY/DR. TURRISI**

[sites.psu.edu/prcprohealth](http://sites.psu.edu/prcprohealth)

## **RESEARCH SOCIETY ON ALCOHOLISM**

[rsoa.org](http://rsoa.org)

## **SAFE AND DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS**

[ed.gov/offices/oese/sdfs](http://ed.gov/offices/oese/sdfs)

## **SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION**

[samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)

## **NATIONAL PRESENTING SPONSOR NATIONWIDE**

[makesafehappen.com](http://makesafehappen.com)



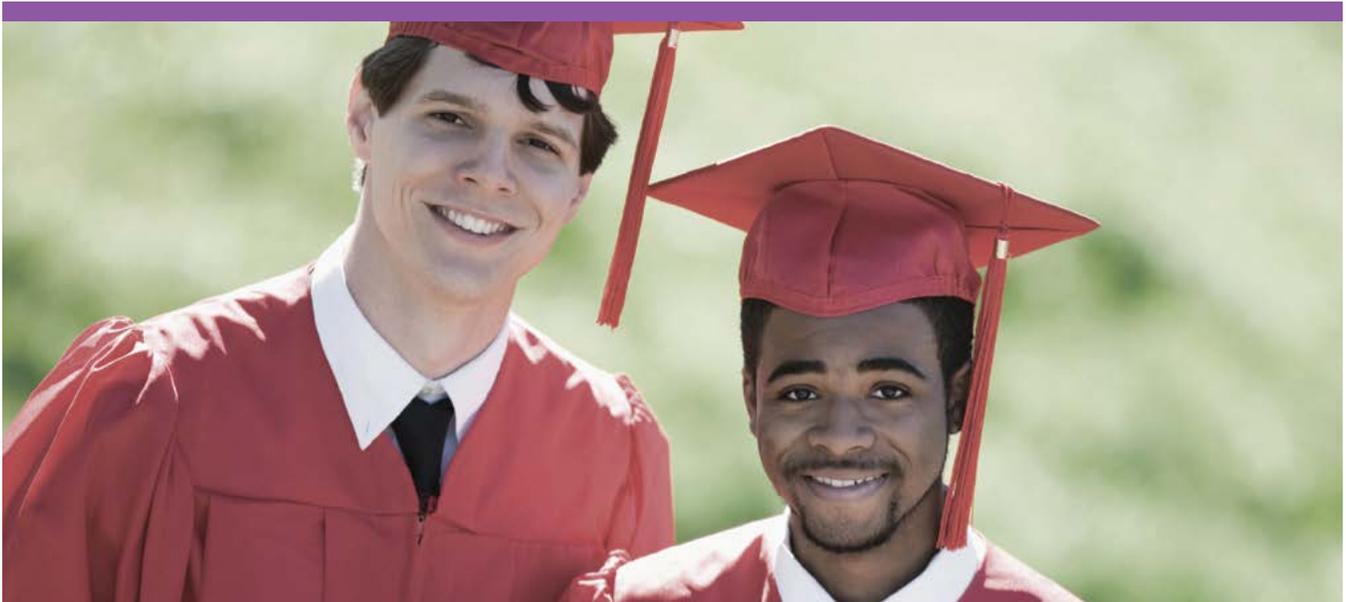
# Final Takeaways

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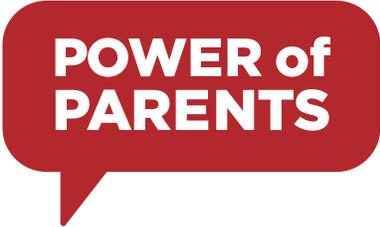
*Parenting is the process of empowering your teen to become an effectively functioning and happy adult.*

## *Use Your POWER To Help Keep Your Teens Safe:*

- *Listen to your teen's concerns respectfully, and use positive parenting techniques.*
- *Set clear rules, such as no drinking or using drugs, no impaired driving, and never ride with others who have been drinking or using other drugs.*
- *Agree on appropriate consequences for breaking these rules.*
- *Enforce consequences when the rules are broken.*
- *Support the 21 Minimum Drinking Age law.*



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**POWER of  
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**1-877-ASK-MADD.**

**MOTHERS AGAINST DRUNK DRIVING**  
511 E. John Carpenter Freeway, Suite 700  
Irving, Texas 75062

[madd.org/powerofparents](https://madd.org/powerofparents)

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# PowerTalk 21<sup>®</sup>

National time to talk with your kids about alcohol and other drugs.

## NATIONAL PRESENTING SPONSOR



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Founded by a mother whose daughter was killed by a drunk driver, Mothers Against Drunk Driving<sup>®</sup> (MADD) is the nation's premier nonprofit working to protect families from drunk driving, drugged driving and underage drinking. MADD is creating a future of No More Victims<sup>®</sup> through it's Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving<sup>®</sup>, supporting law enforcement, ignition interlocks for all offenders and advanced vehicle technology. PowerTalk 21<sup>®</sup> is the national day for parents to talk with their middle and high schoolers about alcohol, using the proven strategies of Power of Parents<sup>®</sup> to reduce underage drinking. As one of the largest victim services organizations, MADD supports victims of drunk and drugged driving and underage drinking at no charge through local MADD victim advocates and at our 24-Hour Victim Help Line, **1-877-MADD- HELP**. Learn more at [madd.org](http://madd.org) or by calling **1-877-ASK-MADD**.

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Irving, Texas 75062

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