

A photograph of a young woman and a man sitting on a bus. The woman is on the left, looking towards the man on the right. They are both looking out the window. The bus interior is visible, including yellow handrails and blue seats.

KEEP SHOWING UP.
They're still growing up.

Having Open Conversations About Alcohol With Your Teen.

It is not uncommon for parents to feel a burden when it comes to discussing the risks of alcohol with their kids. If you are feeling your own hesitations and concerns, know that you are not alone.

While this topic can feel challenging, it is a conversation that still needs to happen. Youth will hear about alcohol from someone, and it is best they hear about it from their parent or guardian. Not every family or child-parent dynamic is the same, but there are helpful pointers for every parent to keep in mind when having talks around underage drinking.

How to Approach the Conversation

When it comes to addressing the risks of alcohol with your teen, keep your conversations honest and straightforward. It may be easy to feel emotional about these subjects, but the most effective way to get the message across is to stick with the facts.

Share the truth with your teen. Your attitude towards alcohol also influences your child's. Try to avoid making jokes about underage drinking or drunkenness. The consequences of underage drinking are serious and should not be downplayed through humor.

Another thing to keep in mind is when you have the conversation. Being in a comfortable setting and when both you and your teen are relaxed can help the conversation be natural and easy.

Frequent "short talks" tend to be more effective than one "big talk." Continuing the dialogue in short increments helps youth better receive the message and demonstrates the importance of the subject.

You want the conversation to go both ways. Open the floor to your teenager and give them a voice to ask questions or share their feelings.

Not Talking About Alcohol Still Sends a Message

Parents can do their children a disservice by not discuss the risks of using alcohol and other substances. Teenagers are going to find out about alcohol one way or another. It is better for them to first discuss the subject and risks with a trusted adult who cares for them.

The Internet, social media, and other peers can send misinformation to teens; so be sure to fact check the information your child is receiving.

Creating a Strong Parent-Child Relationship

The best way to positively influence your teen's behavior is by maintaining a strong and healthy relationship with them. Research confirms that teenagers are more likely to delay drinking when they feel they have a close, supportive tie with a parent or guardian.

There is no magic formula for forming this type of bond, but one of the best places to start is maintaining healthy communication. Healthy communication involves talking often and talking honestly.

Take advantage of opportunities to have real conversations about not drinking underage with your teens. At the end of the day, you want to be heard, and so does your teenager.

Source: Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol - Parents. (2019). <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/make-a-difference-child-alcohol>