

Youth Alcohol Use: A Guide for Parents

Knowledge is parental power. When you have the facts about alcohol use by children, you can practice prevention.

Here are three things parents need to know about alcohol use by young people:

- Drinking in childhood is a serious problem.
- Warning signs can help parents spot a problem.
- Parents can take action and make a difference in their child's health and well-being now and in the future.

Drinking in childhood is a serious problem:

Alcohol has a negative impact on health. Alcohol can damage every organ in your body, including your child's developing brain. It impacts motor coordination, impulse control, memory, and judgment.¹

In addition to its negative impact on health, alcohol use among youth is strongly correlated with violence, risky sexual behavior, poor academic performance, alcohol-related driving incidents, and other harmful behaviors.² Alcohol use also is linked with youthful deaths by drowning, suicide, and homicide.³

Numbers Count

Did you know that alcohol is the #1 drug of choice for children and adolescents?⁴

The seriousness of this problem is seen in the numbers:

- Children who drink alcohol before the age of 15 years are five times more likely than those who start after age 21 to have alcohol problems as adults.⁵
- About 10.8 million underage persons aged 12 to 20 years (almost 30 percent) reported drinking alcohol in the past month. That's more than the total population of Michigan, the 8th largest State. Or think of it this way—that's about one of every four children between the ages of 14 and 19!^{6, 7}
- Nearly 7.4 million (20 percent) were binge drinkers, about the same as the number of people living in Virginia, the 12th largest State.^{8, 9}

Warning signs can help parents spot a problem:

Certain behaviors may indicate an alcohol problem, especially if the behavior occurs suddenly or seems extreme. Parental concern should be even greater if several warning signs occur at the same time.

Signs to Watch For:¹⁰	
<p>Mental Changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory lapses • Poor concentration 	<p>Behavioral Changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School problems, poor attendance, low grades, and/or recent disciplinary action. • Rebelling against family rules. • Switching friends, along with a reluctance to let you get to know the new friends. • Sloppy appearance • A lack of involvement in former interests
<p>Emotional Changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mood changes, flare-ups, irritability, and defensiveness • A "nothing matters" attitude 	
<p>Physical Changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low energy • Bloodshot eyes • Lack of coordination • Slurred speech 	

Remember, as parents, the earlier you start talking to your child about drinking,

Parents can take action:

Kids are flooded with media messages that glamorize alcohol use. They also may be pressured by peers to drink. However, as a parent you have enormous influence on the choices your child makes. Take action: if you find alcohol in your child's room or backpack, or smell alcohol on his breath, do not ignore it.

Communication with your child is the key to preventing underage alcohol use.

Here's what parents can do:

- Learn about the warning signs and how alcohol use can harm your child's mind, body, and emotions.¹¹
- Talk early and often with your child. Tell your children what you expect from them if they are offered alcohol anytime, anywhere. For example, at a party where alcohol is being served.
- Get involved with your child's activities. Encourage your children to participate in supervised groups, clubs, and events that are challenging, fun, and alcohol free.
- Be a good role model. Think about what you say and how you act in front of your child.
- Teach your kids to choose friends wisely and how to form positive relationships.
- Set the rule—no riding with anyone who has been drinking. Tell them to call you if they find themselves in that situation, and assure them you will come and get them, or help them find a way to get home safely.
- Remind them of your rules and the consequences of breaking those rules.

the more influence you may have on their values and decisions. Several short conversations are better than one long lecture. And finally, let them know how proud you are of the good decisions they make!