



# KEEP SHOWING UP. They're still growing up.

## *Small Conversations Can Have A Big Impact.*

When it comes to discussing the risks of underage drinking with your teen, there is no magic formula, but there is a major rule of thumb: have frequent small talks. This is one of the keys to keeping your child alcohol-free. It's not about sitting down for one "big talk." Not only can this feel intimidating for you and your child, but it is often less impactful. Short conversations over time prove to be more effective.

While it's essential to begin the conversation when your child is young, the pressures to try alcohol increase as they enter middle school and high school, making the talks even more necessary in the older years.

You may not be able to combat all the pressures your child's experiences outside of the home, but you can share the real risks that alcohol can have on their mind, body, and relationships. You can also empower them to stand firm to their convictions and live alcohol-free.

### **When Should the Conversations Take Place?**

The chance is that you and your teen are away from each other more often than you are together. From school to recreational activities to maintaining a social life, it may be a struggle to find an overlap in schedules.

If this is the case for you and your teenager, take advantage of the moments you are together, whether during the car ride home or right before bedtime.

When having a conversation about the risks of alcohol, remember that it can feel like an awkward or sensitive topic for you and your child. That's ok. Ensuring that your child's friends or other people aren't around can make it more comfortable.

## What Should the Conversations Look Like?

According to [SAMHSA](#), when it comes to talking with your teen about not drinking, there are five easy tips to guide the conversation:

1. Show you disapprove of underage drinking.
2. Show you care about your child's happiness and well-being.
3. Show you're a good source of information about alcohol.
4. Show you're paying attention and you'll notice if your child drinks.
5. Build your child's skills and strategies for avoiding underage drinking.

Remember that you don't have to get everything across in one sitting. Many small talks are better.

## How to Keep the Conversation Positive?

Before beginning a conversation around alcohol, gauge your feelings and your teen's. Make sure everyone's comfortable and in good spirits before talking.

It is best to have a conversation rather than a lecture. This means you are talking with them, not just at them. Listening to your teen, without any interruption, is as important as talking to them. They want to feel heard as much as you do.

Give your teenager your full attention during the dialogue. Stay off your phone, make eye contact, and be present. Expect the same from your child.

As you prepare to have these frequent conversations about underage drinking with your child, download the ['Talk. They Hear You.'](#) mobile app, from SAMSHA. The free app provides tools and information to help you at the touch of your fingertips.

1. [samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources/what-you-can-do-prevent-your-child-drinking](https://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources/what-you-can-do-prevent-your-child-drinking)



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## *You're Not Alone in Preventing Your Child From Drinking.*

Approaching the topic of alcohol with children is a familiar challenge for many parents. Often, parents or guardians can feel a significant pressure to keep their adolescent from underage drinking.

While parents play an important role in alcohol prevention, they are not alone. Their efforts can be more successful when they take advantage of additional support and resources.

### Have Conversations with Other Parents

Sometimes the best reminder is that you are not alone in your concerns or struggles. You will quickly find this out talking with other parents who have relatable feelings and experiences.

If you are looking for guidance or advice for handling a situation with your teenager, try talking to a parent who has already been there. Learn from their experiences. Hear what worked and what didn't.

Getting to know the parents of your teenager's friends is also a smart strategy. This is a helpful way to keep better tabs on your child. You will most likely also find that you are not alone in preventing your child from underage drinking. Many parents share this concern.

### Join A Local Coalition

Many communities support that focus on alcohol and other substance use prevention efforts. Consider researching to see if this is an option in your area. Becoming a part of this type of community group provides an opportunity to converse with others who have similar goals, become more knowledgeable, and gain prevention strategies.

## Work with Your Child's School

Learn what your student's school is already doing to prevent underage drinking.

Think about joining the school's parent council to stay updated with school policies or provide your own input into future guidelines.

Being involved in your student's school also opens the door to directly connecting with other parents and administrators.

## Take Advantage of Online Resources

Thanks to the Internet, you can directly access countless resources that offer guidance and support to prevent your child from underage drinking.

Rather than blindly navigating these tricky waters, look to what experts in this area have to say. Look into free resources provided by reputable agencies and organizations to support parents when it comes to substance use prevention:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA)
- Illinois Liquor Control Commission
- Prevention First
- Drugfree.org

There are also blogs and other platforms where parents and researchers alike share their personal experiences or guidance around this topic.



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## *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>



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## *Why the Small Moments Matter.*

Never underestimate the impact of brief interactions with your teenager.

While they may seem insignificant at the time, those small moments may be influencing your child more than you realize at the time or on the surface.

Try using these interactions to build your child up and promote a life free of underage-drinking.

### Possible Moments to Discuss the Risks of Underage Drinking

Rather than discussing the risk of alcohol with your teen over one extensive conversation, try having frequent, small talks. Have the discussions during appropriate times when you both are together.

Consider taking advantage of the moments where it's just you and your teen...maybe in the car on the way to practice, or when you're saying goodnight before bedtime.

Regardless of when you have the talks, make sure that you and your teen are in a good headspace to discuss the subject.

### Any Time is Better Than No Time

While you may desire quality time with your teenager, the reality is that this may not play out as you would like. It can be difficult to designate time to spend with your teenager due to both of your busy lives. If this is the case, don't feel defeated.

Instead of spending your energy wishing you had more quality time with your teen, be intentional with any time that you do have with them- even if it's five minutes before they head off to school.

These small windows of time still matter. Try and see them as opportunities to be fully present for your child. Whenever they are around, stay off your phone, provide them your full attention, and be available to really listen.

## Celebrate and Show Up

As a parent, you have the opportunity to be your child's biggest cheerleader. While they may not always receive your support the way that you'd like, don't stop encouraging and rooting them on.

One of the best ways you can show your support is by celebrating and embracing the good in your teen's life. Show your enthusiasm for the positive things they care about and the accomplishments they make.

Even during the 'in-between' or challenges, continue being available for your child. Through difficult moments, offer your encouragement and support. Remind your teen that they are more than their mistakes and that their future is bright.

Source: <https://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources/small-conversations>