

Prevention Begins at Home

Research shows that parents are the most influential people in their children's lives. They play a major role in determining whether or not their children will experience alcohol or other drug-related problems. Recognizing that this puts a big responsibility on you, we've put together this prevention guide to help you.

Start While They're Young

Many parents make the mistake of waiting until their children are driving or in high school before talking about the problems and responsibilities associated with alcohol use.

While it is important to discuss alcohol use with teens, recent studies show that many attitudes about alcohol and other drugs are formed much earlier in a child's life. In fact, a growing number of 12-year-olds can name the brand of alcohol they want to drink. Recent reports show that approximately 30% of high school students report that they drank alcohol for the first time before they were 12 years old. By 9th grade, nearly 65% of students report ever using alcohol in their lifetime.¹

As a responsible parent, it is important that you begin talking openly and naturally with your children about alcohol at a young age. That way, they'll be more likely to accept your views and information rather than relying on peers and the media.

What Can Parents Do?

Whether you're talking with them about it or not, your children are receiving powerful messages about alcohol. These messages are coming from their peers, the media, and even from your behavior.

You can't control all the information your young children receive about alcohol. As their single greatest influence you have the unique ability to prepare them for the peer pressure and flood of pro-alcohol messages to come. In 2009, more than 44% of youth exposure to television's alcohol advertising came from ads placed on youth-oriented programming, that is, programs with disproportionately large audiences of 12- to 20-year-olds.² Some suggestions on reducing pro-alcohol messages include:

- Be selective about television shows, movies, and concerts that show alcohol and other drug use as normal and fun.
- Educate your children on the negative effects of alcohol use when they are watching TV shows, commercials, or movies that portray alcohol use as funny or attractive.
- Be a positive role model and set a good example for your kids. Remember that even the most casual gestures and comments can take on great importance.
- Make sure that your child knows and understands your family's rules. Establish limits and consequences, and stick to them.
- Be active in your child's life. Showing that you have an interest in his/her life shows you care.
- Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Don't be afraid to call the other parents to ensure that they are as responsible as you, and are not providing alcohol or creating an environment in which underage drinking could occur.

Teach them How & When to Say "NO."

Children are being forced to make decisions regarding alcohol use earlier than ever before. That's why it's very important to teach young children decision-making skills as early as possible.

Help your children practice what to say if someone confronts them about alcohol. Tell them that although you expect them to refuse, you understand that saying "NO" is difficult, even for adults.

To begin, work with your children to develop responses that they feel comfortable with, using the following questions and situations. Don't just tell them what to say, and then expect them to parrot your response.

- "What would you do if some older kids came up to you at school and offered you some alcohol? What would you say to them? What would you say if they called you a chicken or a baby?"
- "What could you say if you've finished babysitting and Mr. Jones wants to take you home, but he's been drinking alcohol?"
- "What would you do if an adult offered you some alcohol? What would you say to him or her?"

Help your children come up with appropriate responses, such as:

- "No thanks, not tonight."
- "My parents would ground me."
- Or just plain "NO."

Take the time to listen and show concern. If your children practice saying the answers ahead of time, they will be more likely to use them when a situation does occur.

1. Center for Disease Control, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, 2009

2. Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth, 2009

Tell them the Facts

Children are less likely to use alcohol and other drugs if they know that this behavior is unacceptable to their parents. This means telling children what you expect of them and what the consequence will be if they don't meet these expectations. Try using this four step process.

- 1** Have in mind exactly what you expect. Both parents should be in agreement on expectations. For health and legal reasons, we recommend advocating no use of alcohol until of legal age (which is 21 in all 50 states in the US).
- 2** Sit down with your children and tell them exactly what you expect and why. Make sure they understand. Let them know you are serious.
- 3** Tell your children what will happen if they don't honor your expectations. Choose consequences that are appropriate, immediate, and important to your children.
- 4** Be prepared to follow through. Be realistic about consequences. If you make them too severe, you may be reluctant to impose them. Consistent follow-through is very important.



The Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board's Bureau of Alcohol Education offers a variety of alcohol education materials free of charge.

For more information, please contact us:

Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board Bureau of Alcohol Education

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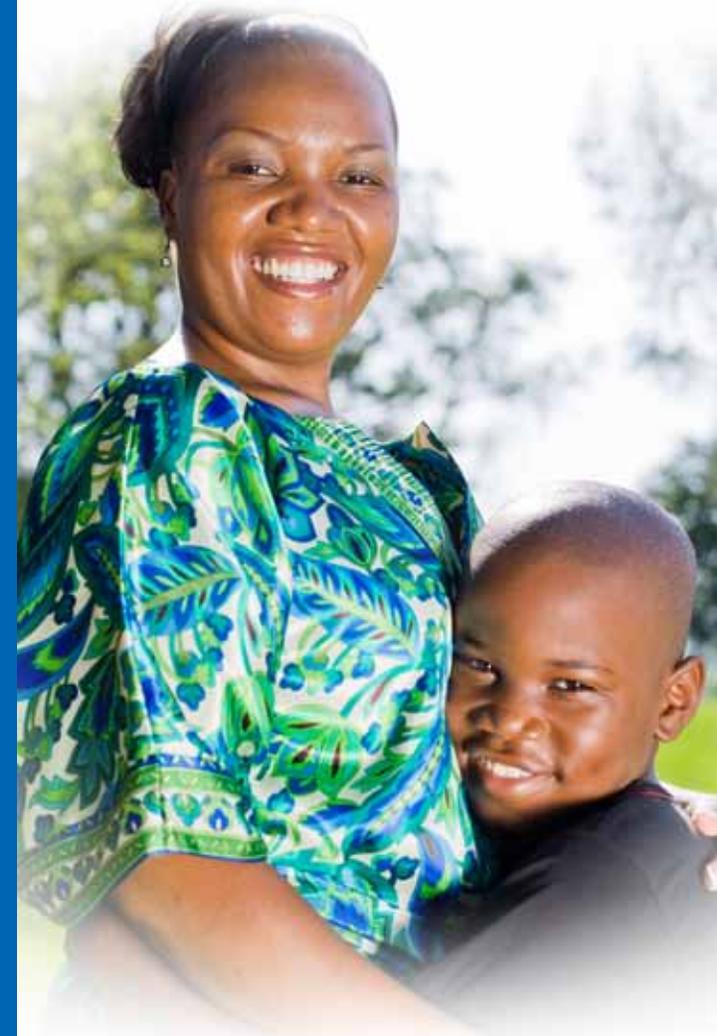
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Talking to your Kids
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