

Representing Responsibility

...Do you remember your favorite teacher or coach? Do you remember admiring them so much you wanted to grow up and be just like them?

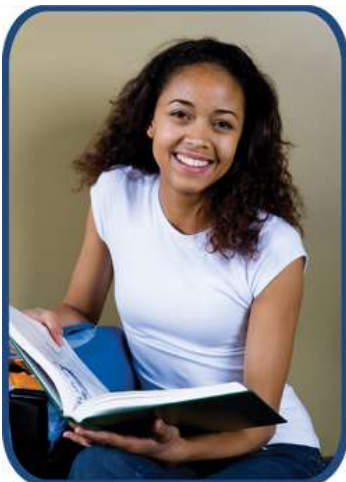
According to the Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey, youth are twice as likely to drink if they perceive that the adults in their community think it is okay. And all too often, young people say that they receive mixed messages from the adults in their lives.

Teachers, coaches, neighbors, friends, and mentors—your messages matter. Whatever your role, in working with young people you are a critical part of the way they see the world and what is expected of them.

Alcohol is so entrenched in our culture that sometimes the line is blurry between what is appropriate to communicate with youth, and what isn't. Here are a few questions to consider as you reflect on the ways you model alcohol messages to the young people in your life:

Do you tell drinking stories in front of youth?

Laughing about heavy drinking can make alcohol seem necessary to have fun and can normalize and glamorize binge drinking. When reminiscing about the good ol' days, make sure to include the constructive lessons you learned from making difficult decisions—or, even better, stick to tales with positive messages. Youth love to hear these stories, and they can use them when they meet similar obstacles.



Have you ever talked about needing a drink to relax?

This can make alcohol seem like a necessary tool for relieving stress and can encourage teens to self-medicate with alcohol when they become anxious or depressed. Try modeling or talking about other ways you relieve stress such as going for a walk, listening to music, playing sports, or reading for pleasure.



How do you respond to youth's stories of using alcohol or other drugs?

Hearing youth's stories provides an opportunity for conversation. Rather than ignoring the stories, which may inadvertently condone the behavior, consider engaging the youth in conversation about the reasons why teens use alcohol or drugs and strategies for making healthy choices. This may also be an opportunity to connect your student with available resources for help.

Youth tend to mimic the behavior and beliefs of those they admire. Chances are if you are an authority figure for a group of youth, some of them admire you enough to want to be just like you.

For more information go to the [Maine Office of Substance Abuse](http://www.maine.gov/education/substanceabuse/).



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