

Tackling Tough Subjects

Some issues are hard to bring up in conversation with your teens, but these are important subjects to discuss with them. Begin the conversation by acknowledging that these are complicated issues, but issues that need to be talked about. Let them know that they may be getting misinformation or mixed messages from other sources so you want them to know clearly where your family stands on this issue and why. The following list provides possible talking points and questions for various “Tough Subjects” conversations about alcohol.

“Why I don’t want you to drink until you’re at least 21”

- Along with many negative health effects, alcohol can affect the development of your brain (link to brain fact sheet).
- It is important to learn social skills as you grow up and to have friendships that are not based on alcohol. What are some of the skills that it takes to make good friends? Can you picture why alcohol might get in the way of developing these skills in the long run?
- One thing that is known is that the earlier a person starts drinking, the more likely they will have an issue with substances. The older a person is before they start to use, the less likely they will become addicted. I don’t want you to take a chance with your future health. Is it important to you to keep your brain and your body healthy? Why?

“Why I don’t want you drinking and driving”

- Drinking while driving is deadly – you should never drive if you’ve been drinking and it’s just as important that you never ride with anyone who has been drinking. What are some things you could do if you find yourself in a situation where you feel like your only option is to get in a car with a driver who’s been drinking?
- It is still not okay to drink even if you aren’t driving – for all of the reasons we’ve already talked about, and one more – when your judgment is impaired you could wind up making the bad decision to get in a car with someone who has been drinking, and that is just as deadly as if you are driving.
- Not driving under the influence is a responsible driving decision – that’s good, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that it is responsible drinking, since there are many other risks related to alcohol aside from driving. What are some of the other problems alcohol can lead to that you’ve learned about in school or elsewhere? What do you think “drinking responsibly” means in our family?

“Why it’s okay for adults to drink, but not youth”

- Points under #1 above apply here too...
- Actually, some adults drink too much and some adults develop addiction or dependence – most who do, started drinking as teens and might have avoided problems if they had waited.
- It’s not only people who are underage that need to avoid alcohol use – adults also can reduce problems by avoiding alcohol use under certain circumstances – for instance if there is a strong family history of alcohol abuse; during pregnancy; while taking certain medications; or while driving, hunting or boating.
- While you might hear that moderate drinking is healthy, if there are any health benefits of alcohol use, they are small and the research indicates that they are limited to people in middle age who never drink more than 1 or 2 drinks daily and who aren’t at high risk for alcoholism, cancer, or other diseases that can be negatively impacted by alcohol use.

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“Why you need to understand the laws about providing alcohol to minors”

- The laws against furnishing are very strict. It is not legal for anybody but your parents to provide you with alcohol – if you allowed someone to provide you with alcohol they will be at great risk of criminal prosecution and the penalties can be as much as \$2,000 or up to a year in jail.
- If you as a minor were to provide alcohol to a friend, you could be charged with furnishing as well as possession (or illegal transportation, if you are caught driving with the alcohol in the car even if you aren't drinking – in that case you would lose your drivers license as well as pay a fine). A furnishing conviction would mean a permanent criminal record, and you would have to report that on job applications for the rest of your life. It could even be a felony if someone is hurt or dies as a result of alcohol that you provided.
- Regardless of whether the person who provides the alcohol is your best friend, your 22-year old brother, the parent of a friend, or a complete stranger, the furnishing laws treat all of them the same.
- Why do you think the laws against furnishing are so strict?

“Why my rules don't necessarily mean I don't trust you”

- Your job as a teen is to test limits, my job as a parent is to set limits and keep an eye on you, to help you stay safe.
- I trust you to make good decisions most of the time, but sooner or later you will find yourself in situations where you have to make choices about alcohol. I want you to know where I stand on those choices, and that I will be watching very closely to see how you handle those situations because the stakes are too high to leave it to chance – I just can't do that because I love you too much to risk losing you. Can you imagine how much pain our family would be in if something bad happened to you?
- Research has shown that teens who believe their parents will catch them are less likely to drink – so I want you to know how important it is to me that you avoid alcohol use. I will enforce our rules and impose the consequences we've agreed on. I will not look the other way if I see any signs that you have been using. What do you think a parent's first actions should be if they suspect that their child has been drinking?

“Why alcohol advertising does not show a realistic picture of drinking”

- The alcohol industry exists to sell alcohol – they need to produce ads that make people want their product, that's how businesses make money.
- One way they do that is to make the actors in their ads look like they are having a great time – in addition to being sexy and attractive. They want people to think that if they drink, they will be fun and sexy and attractive too. Do you believe alcohol can do that for people?
- The alcohol industry would not make as much money if they had to portray the real effects of drinking too much – slurred words, passing out, throwing up, getting addicted, falling down and hurting yourself. Why would people want to buy more of a product that causes so much real damage to our friends, families and communities? What do you think would happen if TV ads showed how people become addicted and suffer other problems because of their alcohol use?

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“Be prepared to deal with your friends’ choices about alcohol”

- Alcohol is so prominent in our society, and someday you will find yourself in a situation where your friends start trying it. You need to be your own person and make your own decision based on what is best for you. If you lose a friendship because you won’t drink, then that wasn’t a very good friendship. Real friends will like and respect you for who you are. Have you ever lost a friend because you wouldn’t do something that they wanted you to do?
- If you are ever concerned about a friend getting into trouble with alcohol or other drugs, I want you to know you can come to me and together we will figure out what to do. If something terrible were to happen to someone you cared about and you hadn’t taken action, that would be tough to live with. It would be better for us to work together to try to help that person. That’s what friends do, even when it’s hard and even when it’s not the fun or popular thing to do. Do you have any friends you are concerned about?

“Why some people develop problems with alcohol and others don’t”

- Addiction has many different causes, and they can vary from person to person. Having a family history of alcoholism increases the risk of becoming addicted. Starting to drink young increases the risk. Kids who have close friends who drink and who know lots of adults who drink too much are also more likely to get into trouble with alcohol.
- Having a naturally high tolerance for alcohol (meaning you get less drunk than other people do after drinking the same amount) also increases the risk, though it often tricks people into thinking that they are less likely to have problems because they think they can drink more without suffering the consequences.
- Nobody sets out to become an alcoholic – addiction happens to good people who didn’t intend it to happen. That’s why your choices when you are young matter so much. Don’t let yourself be tricked into thinking it won’t happen to you. It can happen to anyone.
- Do you know anybody that has had problems with alcohol? How do you think it happened? How can you avoid that happening to you? How can you help your friends avoid it?