

## **Tips for Talking to Your Teen About Underage Drinking and Drinking/Driving**

An honest conversation about alcohol use and drinking/driving is probably one of the most important ones you'll have with your child. Here are some tips for opening the conversation, including what to say – and how to say it.

- Don't wait until it's too late. Underage drinking and drinking/driving doesn't stop at high school – kindergarten isn't too early to talk to your child, and college isn't too late.
- Don't be judgmental. Know that most, but not all, young people will experiment – it's what they do afterward that matters. Talk openly about how they felt after experimenting with alcohol. Discuss how it affects things like reaction time, driving, loss of inhibitions, etc.
- Ask for help from professionals who talk to young people everyday, like the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, school counselors, hospitals, youth ministers, etc.
- Be informed before you initiate the conversation. Watch your child's mannerisms. When they come home you may have some idea whether or not they are already experimenting with alcohol by looking at their eyes to see if they are bloodshot and/or dilated. When you hug/kiss them good night, use all your senses. Look carefully at them, smell their breath/hair/clothes, listen to how they are speaking. These are just a few examples.
- Use current events and stories about underage drinking and drinking/driving issues to open the conversation with your child – AND LISTEN TO WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY.
- Talk about guidelines for checking in. When plans with friends change, ask your teen to call and let you know, BEFORE they leave their location. That way, if anything happens, you can begin a search in one area knowing when and where they were last. Emphasize that this is not a TRUST issue – it is a SAFETY issue.
- Use facts to justify rules, rather than your personal attitudes about alcohol. For example, when establishing a curfew, base the time on statistics (e.g., the highest number of car crashes happen between midnight and 5:00 a.m., with the most serious occurring between 2:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m.), rather than "because I said so."
- Appeal to your child's sense of fairness. Children understand how frustrating it is to be blamed for something they didn't do. Let your child know that until they are 18, you can be held liable for a good majority of their bad decisions.
- Don't overreact. Your teen will probably exaggerate the facts about their – or their friends' – alcohol use at least once, to test your response. If you overreact to this information, your child is less likely to come to you again. Set the foundation for future discussions.
- Be realistic. Parents are the last to know. Always. Friends and boy – or girlfriends will know more about your child's alcohol use than you ever will. An open, honest conversation with your child will be the start of working together to set limits and rules, but don't expect your child to tell you everything – they won't.
- Be consistent. Keep an open dialogue with your teen about alcohol use and experimentation. Regularly watch his or her mannerisms, be consistent with curfews and guidelines for checking in, and make a rule of not overreacting – no matter how great the temptation.

*Source: Lt. Christina M. Guerra, Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, San Antonio Enforcement District*