



APRIL 10, 2025*

KNOW! TO PREVENT UNDERAGE DRINKING

April is Alcohol Awareness Month. It's a great opportunity to start (or continue!) an open, honest conversation about underage drinking with the young people in your life.

Underage drinking rates have been going down over the past few decades. But there's still work to do, as alcohol remains the most commonly used substance among youth.¹

According to the 2023–2024 Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey, 8.7% of Ohio students in grades 7–12 said they drank alcohol in the past month, and nearly 1 in 3 (29%) reported trying alcohol at least once in their lives.²

Talking with young people about alcohol really does make a difference. Unfortunately, only half of Ohio youth said they've had a conversation with a parent or guardian about the risks of drinking.²

Check out the tips below for helpful ways to talk with the young people in your life about alcohol use.

KNOW! THE RISKS

Alcohol is a powerful substance that affects both the body and the brain. Anyone, including young people, can develop alcohol use disorder.³ When youth drink alcohol, it can have serious short- and long-term consequences. They may be more likely to experience:

- Struggles in school, such as lower grades or more frequent absences
- Social challenges like conflict with peers or feeling isolated
- Exposure to physical or sexual violence
- A higher risk of depression or suicide
- Accidents and injuries, including those from car crashes
- Long-lasting changes to how the brain develops
- Dangerous outcomes like alcohol poisoning³

Understanding these risks—and helping young people understand them, too—is an important step in prevention.

KNOW! WHY TALKING MATTERS

Having meaningful conversations about alcohol with the young people in your life can make a big difference. Here's why:

You have more influence than you think

More than 80% of young people say their parents are the biggest influence on whether or not they choose to drink. Talking openly about alcohol helps send a clear message: you do not support underage drinking.

You can be their go-to source

Young people need reliable, honest information to make smart choices. By starting the conversation, you become a trusted source of facts about alcohol.

You show that you care

When young people believe no one is paying attention, they're more likely to take risks, like trying alcohol. Talking about alcohol use shows that you care about their well-being and are there to support them.

You can create a plan together

Use your conversation to talk through real-life situations. Help them come up with responses if someone offers them alcohol, and set up a plan or code word they can use if they ever need help getting out of a tough situation.⁴

KNOW! HOW TO ANSWER THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

Talking with young people about alcohol can bring up some challenging questions—but that’s a good thing! Honest conversations build trust and help them feel comfortable coming to you when it matters most. Here are some common questions and ways to respond:

Why is alcohol bad for me?

Explain that alcohol can seriously affect their developing brain, decision-making, and physical health. Avoid scare tactics and saying things like “You can’t handle it,” which could come off as a challenge. Stick to facts and show that your concern comes from care. You might say:

- “Because your brain is still growing, drinking can change the way your brain works now and into the future.”
- “Drinking before you turn 21 is against the law and can lead to serious consequences.”^{4,5}

I got invited to a party. Can I go?

Use this as an opportunity to talk, not just say “yes” or “no.” Ask if an adult will be there and if they think there will be drinking. Remind them that being at a party with underage drinking can get them into trouble. Be upfront about your expectations and reassure them that you’ll be there to help if they feel unsafe or pressured.⁴

Did you drink as a kid?

Be honest. If you did drink as a teen, acknowledge that it was risky and explain what you’ve learned since then. If you didn’t, explain your reasons for staying alcohol-free. Either way, share your experiences about making smart decisions and the consequences of making unhealthy decisions.^{4,5}

You drink alcohol, so why can’t I?

Explain that alcohol affects young people differently than adults. The law exists to protect developing minds and bodies. Let them know that when adults drink responsibly, it’s in moderation and for specific reasons. Be clear that you also follow safety rules like never drinking and driving.^{4,5}

If drinking is harmful, why does it look so fun on TV?

Talk about how television and advertising often glamorize drinking and don’t show the risks. Ask them what they think advertisers are trying to sell. Then explain how real-life consequences of underage drinking often don’t match what’s shown in the media.³

What if my friends ask me to drink?

Help your young person plan ahead. Practice simple responses they can use to say no, like “No thanks, I don’t drink,” or “I’ve got stuff to do early tomorrow.” Let them know it’s okay to go to a party and not drink—and they don’t have to explain their choice. Reassure them that they can always call or text you (or another trusted adult) for help, no questions asked.^{4,5}

Why do you keep bringing up drinking? It’s not like I’m doing it.

Let them know it’s because you care. You might say something like “I love you and want to make sure you stay safe and healthy—that’s why this matters to me.” Or try, “Even if you’re not drinking, I want you to feel comfortable asking questions or reaching out if something ever happens.”⁵

KNOW! WHEN TO START TALKING

It’s never too early to start the conversation. Just like other important topics, the way you talk about alcohol will grow and change as your child gets older.

For kids ages 5 to 7

At this age, keep things simple and focus on how alcohol affects the body and behavior. Ask open-ended questions to get them thinking:

- “Do you know what happens to your body when someone drinks alcohol?”
- “Why do you think kids aren’t allowed to drink alcohol?”

For tweens ages 8 to 12

As they start to become more independent, talk about why underage drinking is dangerous and help them practice what to do in social situations. Try questions like:

- “What could you say if someone offered you a drink?”
- “Have you ever seen someone drink too much? What happened? How did it make you feel?”

For teens and young adults ages 13 to 20

Now’s the time for honest, two-way conversations about risks, pressures, and personal values. Ask questions that encourage reflection:

- “What’s it like at the parties you go to?”
- “What concerns you most about people your age drinking?”

No matter their age, regular check-ins show your young person that you’re available, you care, and you’re there to help them make safe, healthy choices.⁵

RESOURCES

[SAMHSA - Talk. They Hear You](#)

[NIAA - Talk to your child about alcohol](#)

[AAP - How to talk to your child about alcohol use](#)

[University of Minnesota - Talking to teens about alcohol](#)



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