

Talking with Teens About Alcohol and Other Drugs: 5 Conversation Goals

It's never too late to start talking with your teen about the risks of underage drinking and other substance use.

As teens get older, they make more decisions on their own, and also face more temptation and peer pressure. Though it may not seem like it, teens really do hear your concerns. It's important you show that you care and continue having conversations with them about the dangers of alcohol and other drugs, and why they shouldn't use them.

1 Show you disapprove of underage drinking and other drug misuse.

Over 80 percent of young people ages 10–18 say their parents are the leading influence on their decision whether to drink or not. Don't assume they know how you feel about drinking and substance use. Send a clear and strong message that you disapprove of underage drinking and use or misuse of other drugs.



2 Show you care about your teen's health, wellness, and success.

Young people are more likely to listen when they know you're on their side. Reinforce why you don't want your child to drink or use other drugs—because you want them to be happy and safe. The conversation will go a lot better if you're open and show your concern for their well-being.



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3 Show you're a good source of information about alcohol and other drugs.

You want your teen to make informed decisions about alcohol and other drugs with reliable information about its dangers. You don't want him or her to learn about alcohol and other drugs from unreliable sources. Establish yourself as a trustworthy source of information.



4 Show you're paying attention and you will discourage risky behaviors.

Young people are more likely to drink or use other drugs if they think no one will notice. Show that you're aware of what your teen is up to, but do this in a subtle way and try not to pry. Ask about friends and plans because you care, not because you're judging—you are more likely to have an open conversation.



5 Build your teen's skills and strategies for avoiding drinking and drug use.

Even if you don't think your child wants to drink or try other drugs, peer pressure is a powerful thing. Having a plan to avoid alcohol and drug use can help children make better choices. Talk with your children about what they would do if faced with a difficult decision about alcohol and drugs. Practice saying "no thanks" with them in a safe environment and keep it low-key. Don't worry, you don't have to get everything across in one talk. Plan to check in frequently with quick chats and keep the lines of communication open.

