

Alcohol and Your Child

Alcohol is the number one drug choice in early adolescence, and children are most at risk between the ages of 11 and 14. As a parent, you can effectively discourage and delay alcohol use and avoid future alcohol dependence. To do this, explain to your child the negative consequences of drinking, such as poor judgement, possible injury, and violence. Alcohol only adds to problems instead of solving them. Impaired judgement can encourage sexual relations and aggressive behavior, and consequently can cause unintended pregnancies. A child suffering from alcohol use may be withdrawn and rebellious. Alcoholism can happen to anyone. It is an illness that disrupts relationships, lifestyles, and causes physical and other drug abuse. Other long-term effects of alcohol include heart disease, liver damage, malnutrition, cancer, brain damage, and birth defects.

Modeling proper behavior, monitoring alcohol use within your home, teaching self-respect and how to effectively avoid peer pressure, being aware of any family history of alcoholism, and establishing healthy parent-child communication are all ways to discourage your child from drinking. Remember that in most cases, alcohol is used in your child's life in response to something occurring either socially (i.e. isolation), physically (i.e. insecurities about body), emotionally (i.e. depression), or mentally (i.e. low self-esteem and self-respect). Talking with your child and discussing healthy habits helps you become more aware of how your child addresses life situations and makes decisions. As a result, you may be better able to help should a situation present itself. This section provides early signs of alcohol dependence and activities to assist you in effectively discussing alcohol use and abuse with your child.

ACTIVITY #1: " Role Play Six Ways to Say No!"

Make your child aware of possible confrontations he may face with alcohol. This activity can be done with any number of people. Have your child pretend he is at a party and is being persuaded to drink by others (you can take this role if it is only you and your child doing the activity). Have the person being peer pressured practice the 'Six ways to say no' to a drink. If they have their own ideas about possible non-aggressive responses (such as just walking away), allow them to demonstrate. Change the situations and settings to make the activity less repetitive.

The Six Steps:

- 1) " No Thanks! "**
- 2) " I don't feel like it- do you have any soda? "**
- 3) " Alcohol's NOT my thing. "**
- 4) "Are you talking to me? "**
- 5) " Why do you KEEP pressuring me when I've said NO? "**
- 6) " Back off! "**

These Six Steps come from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. For more information visit www.niaaa.nih.gov.

ACTIVITY #2: " A Real Good Time"

A real good time does not have to involve drinking. Sit with your child and go back and forth each stating an alternative activity to do other than drinking. Start each sentence with, "I don't need to drink. I can have a real good time..." and have them complete the sentence. If there is more than one child playing, have them sit in a circle and go around. Don't allow answers to be repeated. The object of this exercise is to have your children realize that there are so many alternatives to using alcohol.

Possible Answers:

- "... going to the zoo, museum, circus, or carnival. "
- " ... reading a book. "
- " ... spending time with friends or family. "
- " ... joining a special group like the soccer team. "
- " ... playing the piano. "

TAKE ACTION!

- ~ Make your child comfortable to talk honestly with you
- ~ Without being overbearing, keep tabs on your child's activities
- ~ Develop family rules about drinking and have consequences
- ~ Speak to your child about alcohol facts
- ~ Set a good example with your alcohol use
- ~ Encourage your children to develop healthy friendships and to participate in alternative activities
- ~ Be familiar with the warning signs of a drinking problem and act promptly
- ~ Know that you have the power to help your child avoid alcohol use
- ~ Know if your child is at high risk for a drinking problem and take steps to lesson that risk

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RECOGNIZE

SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY BE DRINKING OR HAVE ANOTHER SUBSTANCE-RELATED PROBLEM

- **School difficulties:** poor grades, disciplinary problems, poor attendance.
- **Mood changes:** flux in temper, defensiveness, irritability, easily angered.
- **Switching friends,** and refusal to let you know friends.
- **Rebellious attitudes** towards family rules.
- **'Nothing matters' attitude:** sloppy appearance, little enthusiasm for former interests, low energy.
- **Finding alcohol** in your child's belongings and smelling alcohol on his/her breath. Uses mouthwash to cover use.
- **Physical or mental problems:** poor concentration, memory loss, bloodshot eyes, poor coordination, slurred speech.
- **Self-deception** and the refusal to believe problem.
- **Hangovers,** depression, physical sickness.
- **Sneaking drinks** throughout the day.

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