

Parenting: The Name of the Game

We know teens often think they're in charge. But parents get to make the rules, and you are still your teen's first role model. Making sure they know family rules, including not drinking alcohol underage, is as fundamental as the ABCs and 123s. As your teen develops, update your family rules accordingly. You may encounter some resistance, but that doesn't mean you must change the rules.

Get comfortable with the facts to give your teen a consistent no-use message. These conversations can be challenging, but keeping your children safe takes work and consistency.

There are many reasons to avoid alcohol. Maybe there's a family history of alcohol use disorder, or you want them to keep a good reputation. Whatever it is, there are facts to support you.

- ★ *Your values and beliefs inform their decision-making at this age.*
- ★ *Knowing their parents disapprove of underage drinking is a key deterrent for teens and pre-teens, whether they admit it or not.*
- ★ *Check-in with your teens after they've been out, using your parental instincts to check for anything amiss.*

Source: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/make-a-difference-child-alcohol>

**KEEP
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UP**

They're Still Growing Up

21: Why is Age so Important?

Plenty of youth and many adults wonder why drinking alcohol is not allowed until age 21. Share the facts so they can understand the importance of that age requirement. It's not about keeping them controlled. It's to keep their brains and bodies strong so they can fully develop.

Know that anyone can develop an alcohol problem, even a teen. Alcohol use should be delayed as long as possible. Someone who begins drinking as a young teen is four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than another who waits until adulthood.

If this information is new to you, don't sweat it. When we know better, we can do better.

- ★ *Alcohol can slow reaction time and impair judgment, vision, and coordination.*
- ★ *The brain has been shown to develop well into a person's twenties. Teens are far from that age, and alcohol use could cause changes in their brains while they're still developing.*
- ★ *School performance difficulties and other risky behaviors such as smoking, drug misuse, and risky sexual behaviors are some of the reasons to abstain.*

Sources: <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/minimum-legal-drinking-age>

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Peers: How Do I Fit In?

Many pre-teens and teens feel pressure to fit in with their peers and be part of a group. Youth might perceive that alcohol is part of that scene or use could be expected of them. Parents know there is enough drama and emotion throughout adolescence without alcohol getting into the mix!

In your continuing conversations, keep sending the message that drinking alcohol underage is illegal, and you expect them not to drink. Give a voice to your expectations. You don't have to cover everything about the topic at once; it's better as an ongoing dialogue than a one-time talk.

- ★ *Alcohol can cause embarrassing situations they would not otherwise get into.*
- ★ *Friends and other relationships, like being a teammate, are important during the teen and pre-teen years. Alcohol can change behaviors, ruining relationships and reputations.*
- ★ *With your support and encouragement, each teen has their "why" they choose not to drink alcohol. Teens are trying to express themselves in unique and creative ways. Help let their light shine and find their "why."*

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Brains: Development Happens.

The brain is the epicenter of all life. Without it, we don't breathe, make decisions, or even move our bodies. Teens damaging their developing brains by using alcohol underage can have big consequences both now and down the road.

As our children age, we lose track of how fast they're growing and developing. Research shows the brain develops well into someone's twenties, long past when children are typically considered grown and longer than many adults realize.

★ *Yes, alcohol can make a person act how they wouldn't normally, but do you know why? It's because alcohol can affect the areas of the brain responsible for decision-making and judgment.*

★ *Alcohol at this age "has more potential to disrupt brain function in areas critical to motivation, memory, learning, judgment, and behavior control."*

★ *Alcohol use can interfere with how brain cells communicate.*

As you talk with your teen, make it a discussion, not a lecture. Show that you are a good source of information.

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