

Starting a Dialogue

Reach Out Now:

PREVENT UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE BY TALKING WITH YOUR SIXTH GRADER

1 Talk Together

Open up a dialogue. It's a good idea to let your child know that you want to talk about drinking alcohol and that you are available to have a safe and judgment-free conversation with them. Many adolescents start feeling pressure to drink alcohol with friends as early as seventh grade,⁶ so talk to your child in sixth grade to:

- Set family guidelines about underage alcohol use before it becomes a problem
- Let your children know you are willing to talk about underage alcohol use and that they can come to you with questions or problems
- Prepare your child before peer pressure to drink alcohol is the strongest

2 Share Information

Share the facts. Research shows that parents are the most powerful influence on youth behavior. Parents' disapproval of underage alcohol use has been identified as *the* key reason youth choose not to drink alcohol.⁷ It's important that your child know the truth about underage alcohol drinking. Here's why:

- Though 84 percent of people aged 12–17 have chosen not to drink alcohol in the past month,⁸ even one case of underage alcohol drinking represents a very serious problem.
- Alcohol kills six-and-a-half times more people than cocaine, heroin, and every other illegal drug combined.⁹ Alcohol is the #1 drug problem of today's youth.¹⁰
- Alcohol can hurt you—even if you're not the one drinking alcohol. If you're around people who are drinking alcohol, you have an increased risk of being seriously injured, involved in car crashes, or affected by violence.¹¹ At the very least, you may have to

deal with people who are sick, out of control, or unable to take care of themselves.

- People who begin drinking alcohol before age 14 are seven times more likely than those who began drinking alcohol after age 21 to report being in a motor vehicle crash because of their alcohol drinking.¹²

3 Connect with Your Child

Talking about underage alcohol use with your child can be difficult. It can be confusing for parents and children because it's legal for adults to drink alcohol. Here are some questions that your child might ask and answers that might be useful in your discussions about alcohol:

Q: So what's the big deal about drinking alcohol, anyway?

A: Drinking alcohol can confuse your mind and you could get hurt, sick, or even die.¹³ I really care about you, and I want you to be healthy so I can see you grow up and live a full life.

Q: So how come adults can drink alcohol?

A: Many adults can drink alcohol safely, especially if they limit the number of alcoholic drinks they have at any one time. According to state laws, the legal blood alcohol content (BAC) for adults is .08 percent.¹⁴ No amount of alcohol is safe for children, since their bodies are still growing.

Q: Is drinking beer as bad as drinking wine or liquor?

A: Yes. Beer, like other forms of alcohol, can have a permanent negative effect on your digestive system. It can hurt your heart, liver, stomach, and other organs. Alcohol is alcohol. A 12-ounce beer has about as much alcohol as a 1.5-ounce shot of liquor, a 5-ounce glass of wine, or a wine cooler.¹⁵ Regardless of the alcoholic drink you choose, your body can be harmed.¹⁶

All photos © 2004 Scholastic Inc.

Dear Families:

As a sixth grader, your child is at a pivotal stage of development, testing the waters of experience and independence. During this critical period, your child may be trying new things, including alcohol. Did you know that research has shown:

- Underage alcohol drinkers number nearly 10.7 million youths aged 12–20¹
- The earlier a child drinks alcohol, the more likely he or she is to become dependent on alcohol?²
- More than 40 percent of people who begin drinking alcohol before the age of 13 will develop alcohol abuse problems or alcohol dependence some time in their lives?³
- **You**, as a parent, are the most powerful influence on your child's behavior?⁴

That's why now is the time to talk with your child about alcohol. These Family Resource Guides are part of **Reach Out Now**, a program your child is being taught in school. **Reach Out Now** was developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It can help you open the door to discussion and help build skills to make smart and healthy choices for life.

*Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

Six Key Actions⁵

Here are six actions you can take to help your child make wise decisions about the use of alcohol:

- **Establish and maintain good communication with your child.**
- **Get involved and stay involved in your child's life.**
- **Set clear rules and enforce them with consistency and appropriate consequences.**
- **Be a positive role model.**
- **Teach your child to choose friends wisely.**
- **Monitor your child's activities.**

Take the Pledge Together!

I, _____ [child's name], pledge to my family that I will not drink alcohol before I am old enough to drink alcohol legally. My top three reasons for not wanting to start drinking alcohol before then are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Signed _____

I, _____ [parent's name], pledge to support your decision not to drink alcohol before you are an adult.

Date: _____



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov

These Family Resource pages can help adolescents and families practice:

- Problem-solving skills
- Being a partner in dialogue
- Consistent communication

You can also find important information at <http://family.samhsa.gov>. This valuable site includes resources that can help you talk with your child about the facts of underage alcohol use. Look for **A Family Guide to Keeping Youth Mentally Healthy and Drug Free**. You'll also find additional tools to keep your family healthy.

All photos © 2004 Scholastic Inc.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov

Opening the Door to Discussion

Discussion Points

Youths: Believe it or not, the adults in your life were once your age and wondered about their futures the same way that you wonder about yours! Talk with a family member or another adult about the way he or she felt at your age.

Adults: When you were a child you probably had thoughts and hopes about the future and made decisions affecting its outcome. Read the questions below and share your answers with your child.

When you were in sixth grade, did you wonder:

- What your life would be like when you grew up?
- What you would do?
- What you would look like?
- How you would feel?
- Who your friends would be?
- Where you would live?



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov

Youths: Share your answers to the following questions with your family.

Now that you're in sixth grade, do you wonder:

- What you will do?
- What your life will be like?
- What you will look like?
- How you will feel?
- Who your friends will be?
- Where you will live?

Adults: Write down choices you made in your youth that affected your life as you got older. Then write down what you'd like your child to know about your thoughts on underage alcohol use.

Youths: Write down your ideas about how using alcohol could have a negative effect on your becoming the best you can be.

Learning About Peer Pressure

Pressure Points

The process of making good decisions can be difficult for children because so many external factors influence their choices. Children often rely on their peers to determine what is cool, what clothes to wear, who to be friends with, and how to handle the pressures of growing up. Peer pressure comes in three basic forms that can be either positive or negative. That's why it is important to help your child recognize peer pressure:

Direct Pressure: Someone asks you directly to do something. This type of pressure can be used in negative or positive ways.

Negative Example: Use a fake ID to buy us beer for the tailgate party after the big game on Friday.

Positive Example: You have to try out for the school play. You are a natural actress!

Indirect Pressure: You decide to do something because "everybody is doing it." It may seem like the "in" or "cool" thing to do.

Example: I'm not cool if I don't go to the party on Friday night. Everyone will be there.

Insistent Pressure: Someone won't take "no" for an answer; someone keeps pushing and may try to threaten or scare you into doing something you don't want to do.

Example: You have to tell the teacher that you cheated on the final exam, not me. I don't care what happens, but you better get me out of detention or I'll be waiting for you after school.

Directions: Read the descriptions above and review the examples with your child. Then, read the cartoon* below with your child and identify the kind of pressure present in each situation.



*Source: Project Northland, © Hazelden Publishing and Educational Services



Take Action!

Now think of your own examples of the three types of pressure and identify them. Talk with your child about how these situations would make each of you feel and how you would handle the pressure.

Your Example: _____

Your Child's Example: _____

Your Example: _____

Your Child's Example: _____

Your Example: _____

Your Child's Example: _____

1. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2002. 2, 7. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), *Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol*, 2002. 3. B. E. Grant and D. A. Dawson, "Age of Onset of Alcohol Use and Association with DSM-IV Alcohol Abuse and Dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Epidemiologic Survey," *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9 (1997): 103-110. 4, 5. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (SAMHSA/CSAP), *Keeping Youth Drug-Free*, 2001. 6. Project Northland, Hazelden Publishing and Educational Services, 1998 (www.hazelden.org). 8. The Cool Spot, "Stuff to Know," www.thecoolspot.gov/stuff_to_know.asp. 9, 10, 16. MADD Online, "Myths About Alcohol for Teens," www.madd.org/stats/0,1056,1156,00.html. 11, 13, 15. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Tips for Teens: Alcohol*, 2000. 12. MADD Online, "Underage Drinking Research," www.madd.org/stats/0,1056,1114,00.html. 14. MADD Online, "Number of Drinks and BAC in One Hour of Drinking," www.madd.org/stats/0,1056,1184,00.html. All photos © 2004 Scholastic Inc.