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## CREATE AN EXIT PLAN

Help your child create an "exit plan" in case they're offered or faced with a difficult decision about alcohol or other drugs. Peer pressure can be powerful and comes in many different forms, so work with them to come up with realistic action steps and practice those steps together in a safe environment. This will prepare and empower them to make good choices when it matters.

Research suggests that one of the most influential factors for children is a strong, open relationship with a parent or caregiver.

For more information on how to talk with your child about underage drinking and other drug use, visit [talktheyhearyou.samhsa.gov](http://talktheyhearyou.samhsa.gov) and [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).

To download and order "Talk. They Hear You." campaign materials online from the SAMHSA Store, visit [www.store.samhsa.gov](http://www.store.samhsa.gov).



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**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

# TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT ALCOHOL:

## Keeping Your Kids Safe





## GET INFORMED

**Is alcohol addictive?** The short answer is “yes.” Alcohol, like other drugs, has a powerful effect on the brain, producing both positive and negative feelings. These feelings can motivate some people to drink alcohol repeatedly, despite risks to their health and wellbeing. When people with an alcohol use disorder (AUD) stop drinking, they experience withdrawal symptoms—or symptoms that are opposite to the pleasurable feelings that may be experienced when drinking alcohol. These symptoms can be physical (sleep disturbances, pain, feelings of illness) and emotional (sadness, irritability, anxiety, and emotional pain).

Young people are especially at risk for developing an AUD. Drinking alcohol during adolescence may affect brain development, making it more likely that users will be diagnosed with an AUD later in life.

### The impact of alcohol on kids:

- Kids who drink alcohol have higher rates of academic problems and poor school performance compared with nondrinkers.
- Drinking alcohol increases the likelihood that kids will engage in risky behavior or do something that they’ll regret when they’re sober.
- Young people who drink alcohol are more likely to have mental health issues such as depression and anxiety disorders.

## BE PREPARED

When kids worry about things like grades, fitting in, and physical appearance, they may drink alcohol or use other drugs to escape their problems. Life events, such as changing schools, moving, or divorce, can also cause kids to turn to alcohol or other drugs. As a parent or caregiver, it’s important for you to be prepared for these moments.



### Use these tips:

- Think about how you’ll start the conversation – take into account your child’s age and maturity level.
- Remember the conversation goes both ways – it’s important to hear their point of view.
- What you say is just as important as what you do – set a good example.

## TAKE ACTION

Parents significantly influence their children’s decisions about whether or not to experiment with alcohol and other drugs. One of the most influential factors during adolescence is having a strong, open relationship with a parent or caregiver. When parents and caregivers create supportive and nurturing environments, kids make better choices. Though it may not always seem like it, kids really do hear their parents’ concerns, which is why it’s important to talk with them about the risks and dangers of drinking alcohol or using other drugs and convey clear expectations for them to avoid substance use.

### Use these conversation tips:

- Set clear expectations, and talk with them early and often about the risks and dangers of underage drinking and other drug use.
- Use everyday opportunities to talk with them—in the car, during dinner, or while watching TV.
- Let them know you’re always there for them.
- Teach them about good health and the importance of taking care of their minds and bodies.
- Teach them how to say “no” if someone offers them alcohol or other drugs.