



#### Facts on youth and alcohol

America's young people are drinking alcohol at an earlier age and in larger quantities. Did you know...

- Forty percent of ninth-grade students have consumed alcohol before age 13. (CDC, 2000)
- Fifty-six percent of underage students say that drinking "to get drunk" was an important reason for drinking. (Weschler, 2001)
- Over half of all underage students report that alcohol is "very easy" to get. (Weschler, 2002)



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Underage drinking:  
You can prevent it when they're under your influence.



sit down. speak. listen.

#### Hispanic youth may be more at-risk

Even though we as parents will continue to do all we can to secure our children's success, there are still some alarming statistics that we should all be aware of. **Alcohol before age 21 can diminish your child's potential.** Knowing the facts about alcohol can help you keep your child alcohol-free and can help them reach their full potential.

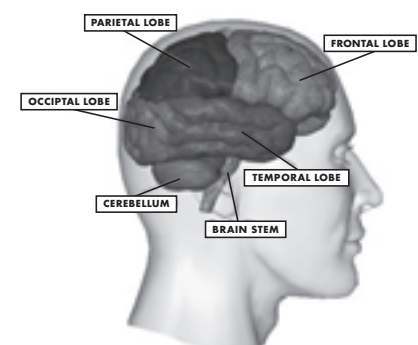
- Hispanic young people are more likely to drink and to get drunk at an earlier age than non-Hispanic white or African-American young people. (NIDA, 2002)
- Mexican and Cuban 12-17 year olds are more likely to binge drink than the general population in that age group. (SAMHSA, 2001)
- Alcohol use contributes to the three leading causes of death among Hispanic 12-20 year olds: unintentional injuries (including car crashes), homicide and suicide. (AMA, 2000)

This brochure is designed to give you the best tips and techniques for ensuring that your kids are safe and making healthy choices. Every parent hopes their child is successful. The best way to prevent your child from becoming a statistic is to talk to them today about the dangers of underage drinking.

#### Effects of alcohol on the growing brain

New research indicates that teenagers who drink too much may lose as much as 10 percent of their brainpower—the difference between passing and failing in school... and in life.

Alcohol can produce a wide range of effects, from a mild "buzz" to death. This happens because of what occurs in the brain when alcohol is consumed.



Although **underage drinking** is a serious societal problem, as a parent you can shape the behavior and attitude of your children as it relates to alcohol. The best way to influence your child to avoid drinking before age 21 is to have a strong, trusting relationship with him or her. Research shows that children ages 10 and 11 whose parents fostered communication, were highly involved and set clear expectations were more likely to see alcohol use as **harmful** and were less likely to initiate early alcohol use. They were also less likely to use alcohol at the ages of 17 to 18.

It's important for you to be more aware of the dangers of underage drinking and how you can prevent it through the implementation of an action plan. This brochure will provide you with information on the current state of underage drinking, youth alcohol use, the **negative consequences** of alcohol and action steps that you can implement to influence your child's attitude and behavior as it relates to alcohol. **Start the conversation today.**



change the statistics.

### Alcohol can...

- Impair motor coordination (the ability to walk or drive)
- Impair memory (produces blackouts)
- Impair judgment and decision making (people often think they are "OK" to drive when they are not)
- Impair impulse control (increase the odds that you'll do things you might regret later)
- Cause death (by directly affecting the pons and medulla part of the brain which controls vital reflexes like breathing, heart rate, gagging, etc.—alcohol can shut down these reflexes, directly causing death)

Until recently, most people believed that the brain had finished developing by the late teen years. We now know the brain is still developing through the early twenties. Prematurely introducing alcohol to the brain can seriously affect how the brain develops.

In fact, there are specific parts of the brain that are affected by alcohol. The frontal lobe, the hippocampus, the pons and medulla and the cerebellum all suffer when alcohol is consumed. The frontal lobe plays an important part in planning, decision making, impulse control, memory and many other activities. The hippocampus is important in memory formation, particularly for new facts and events. Alcohol impairs memory in part by disrupting brain function here. The pons and medulla contain groups of cells that control vital reflexes—like breathing, heart rate, gagging, etc. Alcohol can shut down these reflexes, causing death. Alcohol also disrupts activity in the cerebellum which plays an important part in balance and motor coordination.

The brain images below show how alcohol may harm teen mental function. Compared with a young non-drinker, a 15-year-old with an alcohol problem showed poor brain activity during a memory task. This finding is noted by the lack of pink and red coloring.

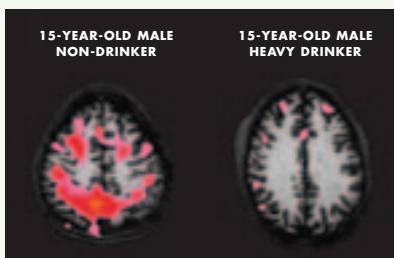


Image from Susan Tapert, PhD, University of California, San Diego.



I'm listening.



### Starting to drink too early can create a lifetime of problems

Introducing your child to alcohol is never a good idea—talking to them about it is. Allowing your child to consume alcohol before the legal age of 21 can have serious negative effects:

- Teens 15 and older who drink alcohol are seven times more likely to have sexual intercourse than those who do not drink. (CASA, 2002)
- Young adults who are heavy drinkers are more likely to use marijuana and other illicit drugs. (SAMHSA, 2000)
- In 2000, 2,339 youth ages 15-20 died in alcohol-related crashes. That's 50 per week. (NHTSA, 2000)

Remember that dialogue is the best prevention to underage drinking.

### How to start the conversation with your kids

Talking to your child about alcohol can be difficult. But the sooner you begin to have these conversations as a family, the easier it will be for your children to turn to you with any alcohol-related issues they may have in their teens.

Here are some quick tips on talking to your child about the tough topic of underage drinking:

- **Be clear, direct, and specific—always.** Let your child know exactly what is acceptable and unacceptable when it comes to alcohol.
- **Take advantage of the media to discuss alcohol-related issues.** Television, newspapers, movies, and even books and magazines can present openings for discussions.
- **Try not to lecture,** having a conversation instead sometimes works best.
- **Create a conversation that makes your child feel comfortable.** Your child will look for signs such as the tone of your voice, facial expressions and body language to react from.
- **Encourage your child to talk.** Use door-opening statements ("You seem distracted today..." or "Tell me what is going on...") that invite a response.
- **Be honest with your child!** You don't have all the answers about alcohol, and it's okay to say so—this could be a great opportunity to do some research with your child and learn something new together.

Conversation is a great tool in building trust between children and their parents. Multiple discussions regarding underage drinking should happen throughout the pre-teen and teen years because new concerns will arise as kids grow older and are faced with different situations. Here are a few phrases to pass along to your child if they are ever faced with the decision to accept and consume alcohol:

- 1) "I don't drink" or "I don't want to drink"
- 2) "I'm driving."
- 3) "I don't like the taste. I'll have a soda instead."
- 4) "Drinking at my age is illegal."
- 5) "I don't want any problems."
- 6) "I don't want to lose my parents' trust and end up being grounded."
- 7) "No - I have to be up early in the morning."

Talking to your teen is important. Whether they admit it or not, children need to know that they have their parents support. Talking to your child about the negative effects of underage drinking can make a huge impact on the decisions they make about alcohol. Knowing that they can come to you with questions or concerns will give them the confidence they need to make responsible decisions about underage drinking. Remember, you are your child's number one defense!

### Helping your child deal with peer pressure

As pre-adolescents grow, their bodies begin to go through rapid physical, emotional and social changes. They also begin to question adult standards and the need for their parent's guidance. After all, their peers (friends or acquaintances) look like them, act like them and many of them are experiencing the same things they are experiencing, making peer pressure easy to fall into.

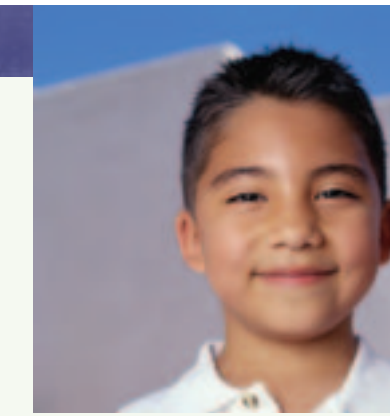
Some kids give in to peer pressure because they want to fit in with their peers, be liked and accepted. So when it comes to drinking, they believe that if they drink alcohol like their peers, they will be liked by their peers. Another common reason for drinking is the fear of being teased or becoming unpopular if they don't go along with the group. Others may do it because they are curious to try something new that others are doing. The idea that "everyone's doing it" may influence some kids to leave their better judgment or their common sense behind.

Here's what you can do to help your child deal with peer pressure.

- Build up your child's self-esteem very early in their lives—teens who have a positive image of themselves are generally not as afraid to stand up for what they know is right.
- Give your teen experience in making decisions—big and small.
- Practice assertiveness skills for times when your teen will have to say "no" in difficult situations—have open discussions about how to turn down offers to harmful substances or activities such as alcohol, underage drinking and drinking and driving.
- Discuss the teen's fear of being different—explain that saying "no" can be scary but it is the mature and courageous thing to do.

Dealing with peer pressure can be tough at any age, but especially for youth who are still trying to figure out who they are. Strong parental support and a safe and supportive environment for adolescents will also help give youth the courage they need to fight off negative peer pressure.

youth and alcohol don't mix.



### Creating an action plan

There are several different ways that you can take an active role in helping to keep your child alcohol-free.

**Monitor Alcohol Use in Your Home** - If you keep alcohol in your home, keep track of the supply.

**Connect With Other Parents** - Getting to know other parents and guardians can help keep you aware of what's going on in your child's life.

**Keep Track of Your Child's Activities** - Be aware of your teen's plans and whereabouts.

**Develop Family Rules About Teen Drinking** - When parents establish clear "no alcohol" rules and expectations, their children are less likely to begin drinking.

**Set a Good Example** - Parents and guardians are important role models for their children—even children who are fast becoming teenagers. If you use alcohol, set a good example and drink responsibly.

Some suggestions:

- **Don't support teen drinking** - Your attitudes and behavior toward teen drinking also influence your child. Even if you drank when underage, it still does not make it safe for your kids. Remember, too, that it is illegal in most states to provide alcohol to minors who are not family members.
- **Help your child build healthy friendships** - If your child's friends use alcohol, your child is more likely to drink too. So it makes sense to try to encourage your child to develop friendships with kids who do not drink and who are otherwise healthy influences on your child.
- **Encourage healthy alternatives to alcohol** - One reason kids drink is to beat boredom. Therefore, it makes sense to encourage your child to participate in supervised after-school and weekend activities that are challenging and fun.

Taking an active role in preventing your underage child from drinking takes work, but is well worth it. Your child's future is at stake!

### Make your action plan a family affair

La familia goes well beyond just parents and siblings. For Latinos, it's our foundation. It's the root of our values and an integral part of daily life. As a result, other family members and close friends may play a key role in helping you watch over your children and give them guidance. They will participate in celebrating birthdays, baptisms, first communions, graduations, weddings, holidays, and other exciting and festive times where alcohol may be part of the celebration.

You can do all the preventive work in the world and have great communication with your children, but your family and friends need to support and reinforce the parameters that you've already established with your child. It is important that you let your family and friends know that you do not allow your children to drink alcohol and encourage them to do the same. It can be hard, but you can always share the information you have learned about the negative consequences alcohol can have on your child.

Your children are taught the importance of honor, dignity, pride, and respect for authority and elders. These ideals establish the adults participating in your child's life as role models. When an adult or family member offers alcohol to a child, it may be uncomfortable for them to say "no thanks." In order to avoid this situation, talk to your family and friends and let them know that you do not approve of underage drinking and have already established clear rules with your child about underage drinking. Ask them for their help in teaching and reinforcing these parameters. Tell them that you will pay them the same respect because you want what's best for their children as well.



### That's a wrap!

The Hispanic youth population is quickly on the rise—help your child be a positive role model for other youth by talking to them about not consuming alcohol before the legal age of 21. Alcohol can diminish your child's potential by causing harm to the brain. All kinds of risky behavior, including unprotected sex, is associated with underage drinking. This is an on-going conversation that needs to start early. You'll also have a better chance at dealing effectively with peer pressure if you build a strong foundation early on.

Remember that early introduction of alcohol does not guarantee responsible drinking. Instead, talk to your kids about the negative effects of underage drinking. Kids drink for several different reasons. Understanding your child's views on alcohol will help in clearing up the myths and misconceptions about underage drinking. Helping them deal with peer pressure is another important way to help. By developing clear family rules about underage drinking early in a child's life, your teen will be more accepting of your wishes to not drink until the legal age of 21.

Talk, talk, and talk to your kids about the negative effects of underage drinking. And just as important to the process is listen, listen, and listen to what your kids have to say to you about alcohol. It's an on-going conversation that needs to start early. If you need more information about underage drinking, please contact your local MADD chapter by calling 1-800-GET MADD (1-800-438-6233). If you'd like additional online tools for talking to your child, please visit [www.foryourchild.org](http://www.foryourchild.org).

you can make a difference—protect your child's brain and their future.