



Be prepared to talk to your children
ABOUT DRINKING

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

If you have young children, pre-teens or older teenagers, you are probably wondering

- **how to behave** with them and in front of them;
- **what you should know** so you can answer their questions and keep them informed;
- **what you should say** in certain situations.

This guide is divided into three sections to help you in the process. Information is also colour-coded by age category, to make it easier to find what you're looking for.

Whatever the age of your children

pp. 2 to 5 and 14 to 19

8 to 11-year-olds

pp. 6-7 and 20-21

12 to 14-year-olds

pp. 8-9 and 22-23

15 to 16-year-olds

pp. 10-11 and 24-25

17 to 18-year-olds

pp. 12-13 and 26-27

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly 30% of all people 15 years and older in the NWT have tried alcohol at 14 years of age or younger. 83% of people 15 years and older in the NWT have tried alcohol at 19 years of age or younger. This means that there is an extremely good chance that your child has tried alcohol.

However, some parents are not aware of how important it is for them to talk to their children about drinking, the sooner, the better, before problems develop, rather than after the fact. They also do not realize that contrary to popular opinion, parents have a great deal of influence over their children when it comes to drinking. What they say and especially what they do is of prime importance to their children's future behaviour.

This guide is based on three clear principles:

- The Northwest Territories Liquor Commission **is providing parents with the information** to help educate their children about drinking and how to better handle certain alcohol-related situations.
- We are **not dictating any particular line of conduct** for parents to follow. It is up to them to decide if at what age, under what condition and in what quantities their children will be allowed to drink.
- Nevertheless, we do have a fundamental belief and a very clear stand: **abusive drinking, drunkenness and intoxication are absolutely unacceptable**. Under no circumstances should they be tolerated.

HOW TO BEHAVE with your children, whatever their age

It's not always easy to be a parent

You are probably asking yourself many questions.

- How should I bring up the subject with my youngest?
- Should I wait until he asks me questions?
- Am I right to believe that my teenager is not going to drink?
- Who should talk to him, his father or me?
- My wife says I'm the one who should talk to my son about his beer-filled weekends. Is she right?
- What should I do if I think his friends are having a bad influence on him?

You probably don't always have the answers. You want to take a positive approach, be an understanding parent, have your children trust you, but at the same time, you're not sure you're being effective. There's no course you can take on how to keep your kids from drinking, and sometimes you are faced with a *fait accompli* without being sufficiently prepared.

Prevention begins with the family

Support your kids as much as possible, congratulate them, encourage them, hug and kiss them. Don't take it for granted that they know you love them. You have to tell them. This means trusting them, while at the same time setting limits, without being afraid of losing their love.

Doing things together as a family gives you a chance to spend time together and to get closer to them (watching television or a video together and discussing it, preparing a meal, playing sports, enjoying hobbies, etc.).

You are the role model

Your attitude, your actions, your words, your choices have a major influence on your children even if you sometimes get the impression that they aren't paying any attention to you.



***Your attitude, your actions, your words, your choices
have a major influence on your children.***

HOW TO BEHAVE with your children, whatever their age

At what age can they start to drink?

There is no particular age at which it is considered “normal” for children to start drinking. Even very young children sense – and often understand – the difference between alcoholic beverages and non-alcoholic ones.

You may think it is best to offer your child a little wine at the family dinner table on special occasions, knowing full well that he could sneak a drink behind your back.

In some societies, it is considered beneficial to introduce children to drinking under controlled circumstances. Research shows that in these societies, the incidence of alcohol-related problems is lower.

Whatever you decide, under no circumstances should alcohol abuse ever be tolerated. Not for them, and not for you.

Are your children afraid to talk to you about drinking?

Have you considered what your children might be thinking about all this? They may trust you and talk freely with you. Or perhaps not. Maybe they are concerned that

- you’re going to worry too much;
- you won’t let them go out with their friends;
- you’ll ask far too many questions;
- you’re too strict and don’t understand anything about what kids their age need;
- you’re going to stick your nose into their business;
- you won’t trust them anymore.



It's never too soon

Kids often know a lot more than we think. Six-year-olds already have a pretty good idea of what is socially acceptable behaviour for adults and children when it comes to alcohol. So you can start talking to them about drinking at a very early age.

Set the example yourselves

Children tend to mimic the behaviour of those they love and admire, especially that of their parents. It's fairly safe to assume that your drinking habits are the ones your children will adopt later on. If drinking, both socially and while dining, is a part of your lifestyle, your children will grow up assuming that this kind of drinking is natural and occurs under happy, relaxed circumstances.

When you drink, drink moderately. Your attitude will set an example for your kids. If you or others in your circle abstain from drinking, you can simply point out that this is a personal choice.

The age of the first drink is crucial

- The earlier the child starts to drink, outside of strictly controlled circumstances, the greater the risk that he will have problems with drinking in the future.
- The earlier that teenagers start drinking, the more frequently they say they drink.





One in four 9-year-olds has tried drinking.

HOW TO BEHAVE with 8 to 11-year-olds

Be firm

- Don't imagine that children this age do not drink, even if alcohol is not a drink for children.
- Just because you are having a drink doesn't mean your children may. At a family occasion, your youngster may ask for a sip. He may whine and carry on. This is the time to take a clear stand.
- You may allow him to wet his lips or take a tiny sip from your glass, so that he won't be tempted to try it behind your back, say, when the glasses are being cleared from the table or when she finds a bottle left behind.
- Allowing that little taste or a sip of something cut with water gives children an experience some of them are very eager for. It does not, however, give them outright permission to drink.
- Explain the difference between drinking in moderation and abusing alcohol.

The idea is not for you to avoid drinking because of the children, but rather to show them that there is enjoyment in drinking moderately.

Every parent has a decision to make with each child, based on the age of the child and your own principles. Whatever you decide, stick to it. Explaining the reasons for your decision will help your children develop the ability to make their own informed decisions.

At children's parties, be sure that...

- there are organized games and activities;
- there are plenty of snacks, soft drinks and juices;
- an adult is around (not necessarily present every second, but always nearby).

Never leave children alone for the entire evening without supervision.



***Over one-quarter of 13-year-olds drink alcohol:
2.7% just about every week and 24% just about every month or less.***

HOW TO BEHAVE with 12 to 14-year-olds

Be vigilant

This is the age when teens start to experiment and test parental authority. They are looking to assert themselves and they want to try drinking to see what it feels like.

Don't panic

If you discover that, despite your strict rule against it, your child has been drinking outside the house, don't panic and don't overreact. Kids who want to try drinking are obviously not going to do it at home or at school, where it is forbidden: they will do it at a party, in a park, in an alley or at a friend's house. Above all, do not take it for granted that what is socially acceptable for you is the same for them.

Be firm

- Explain to your child how alcohol affects the body and the kind of risks that are involved in drinking.
- Be clear about your expectations and establish very specific rules that are reasonable and enforceable.
- You may even want to sign an agreement, setting out very clearly the terms of the agreement, and the consequences if the child does not abide by them. Once you make an agreement, be sure you stick to it.

If, in your family, youngsters and teens are allowed to drink small quantities of alcohol on special occasions, make sure they understand the difference between those special occasions and the rest of the time.



***24% of 16-year-olds drink alcohol just about every week.
Just 23% of 16-year-olds have never had a drink.***

HOW TO BEHAVE with 15 to 16-year-olds

Peer pressure

This is the age when teens assert themselves more. They go out with groups of friends more often, and there is pressure by some of the group “leaders” to do what everyone else is doing. At parties, they will surely want to have beer. Now is the time to remind them of your agreement, if you signed one. And remember to stick to it.

In most families, on special occasions at home (birthdays, weddings, Christmas, etc.), alcohol is part of the celebration, and it is strongly associated with pleasure and enjoyment. Nevertheless, it is up to you to decide whether your teens may drink, and how much.

Support and supervise

- Always know where your teens are, whom they’re with, what they are doing and how they are behaving. Provide support through supervision. Proper supervision is a key to good parenting, especially when it comes to drinking. Kids sense that you’re monitoring them, even when you’re not around. Just be sure that you don’t overdo it, and remember to trust your children.
- Be in charge, but be reasonable. This means defining your expectations and establishing clear, reasonable and enforceable rules. Remember: parents who set limits while listening and remaining warm and loving have more success “protecting” their teens when it comes to drinking than do those who are strictly authoritarian or overly permissive.



*In spite of the rules, the desire to belong to a group,
to assert oneself in this manner is stronger than the warnings.*

HOW TO BEHAVE with 17 to 18-year-olds

Belonging

- At this age (and sometimes earlier), teens who drink care little about what their parents think.
- They are influenced by advertising that associates drinking with good times, and identify willingly with those happy people in the ads whose experiences seem to be as perfect as their bodies.
- This is also the age when kids assert themselves and show off by driving fast. When alcohol is added to the mix, the risks skyrocket. If your teens are driving, remind them that they may be licensed to operate a car, but they are not allowed to have the slightest drop of alcohol before getting behind the wheel.
- Remember, too, that communicating with teens at this rebellious age can be more difficult because of their need to separate from their parents and forge their own identity.
- According to Northwest Territories law, 19-year-olds are allowed to buy alcohol.

Be open

Don't be afraid to speak frankly. Just because they're as big as you are (or bigger!) doesn't mean you've lost your right to have your say. When you talk with them, be sure that everyone's views are heard and respected.

Talk to them about what can happen if they drink at work, at school, while playing sports, or when driving.

Maintain your emotional ties with them

The absence of an emotional connection with your teenagers, combined with a lack of support, makes them more vulnerable to peer pressure, which can influence them to drink, and to drink too much.

It is up to you to try to achieve a balance between emotional connection and the kind of independence you want your kids to have.

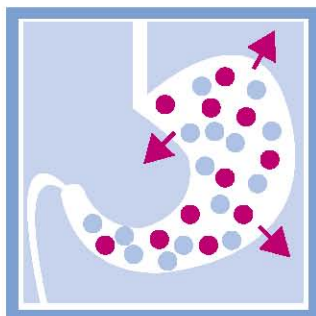
WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: the physiological effects of alcohol

THE STAGES OF ALCOHOL METABOLISM IN ADULTS

1

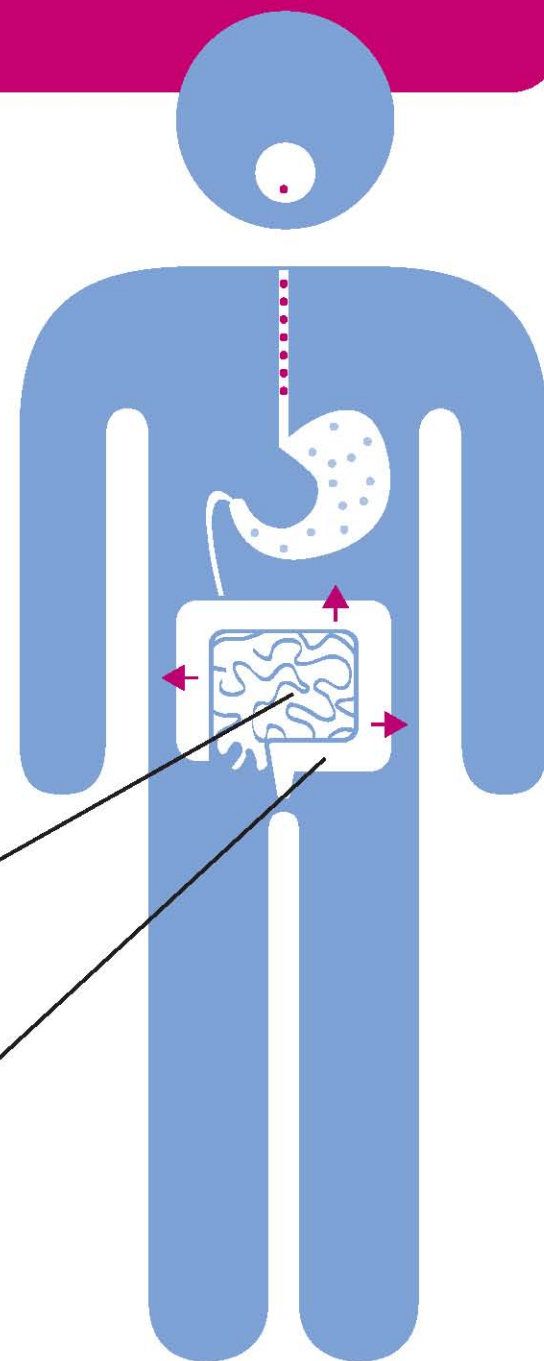
ABSORPTION

As soon as you start to drink, alcohol begins entering the blood. It takes about an hour for all the alcohol you have drunk to be in your bloodstream. The rate at which alcohol is absorbed in the stomach and intestines will depend on how much food you have eaten. If your stomach is empty, the alcohol will pass into the bloodstream immediately and you'll feel the effects more quickly.



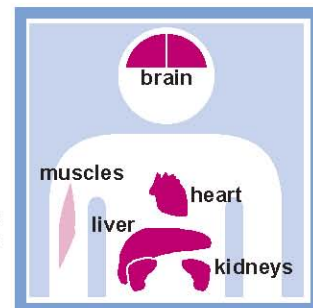
In the small intestine,
alcohol passes
rapidly into the
bloodstream.

In the large intestine,
alcohol passes more slowly
into the bloodstream.



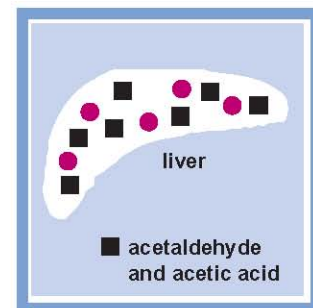
2 DISTRIBUTION

Alcohol is carried by the blood to just about all the tissues that contain water, and thus it spreads to all parts of the body. **The highest concentrations of alcohol are found in the brain, the liver, the heart, the kidneys and the muscles.**



3 METABOLISM

About 90-95% of the alcohol you drink is metabolized by special enzymes in the liver. A healthy liver can metabolize alcohol at a rate of about 15 milligrams per 100 millilitres of blood per hour. Liver enzymes break down the alcohol into various substances, the most important of which are acetaldehyde and acetic acid.



4 ELIMINATION

Most of the alcohol is eliminated via the kidneys, in the urine. The kidneys also eliminate water, which explains the increased urine production and subsequent dehydration, which makes you thirsty. The rest of the alcohol you ingest (5%) is eliminated untransformed through breath, sweat and saliva.

People who are used to drinking do not feel the effects of alcohol in the same way as those who don't drink as often. Nonetheless, the quantity of alcohol in their blood remains the same.

It's not the same

A man and a woman of the same age and weight may drink exactly the same amount, but the woman will feel the effects sooner. Women also have less water in their bodies than men, so the concentration of alcohol in their blood will be higher, even if they drink exactly the same amount.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: the physiological effects of alcohol

Beware of the bubbles

Champagne, sparkling wines and premixed carbonated drinks (soft drinks or fruit juice mixed with alcohol) act more quickly, because the carbon dioxide speeds up the process by which alcohol is evacuated from the stomach.

The trouble is, pre-mixed drinks tend to contain more sugar, which masks the harsh taste of alcohol, making it easier for teenagers to drink more of them than they would regular drinks.

Alcohol is a sedative

Despite its mildly euphoric effect, alcohol is not a stimulant: in fact, it slows brain activity and reduces tension.

Alcohol poisoning can lead to a coma and even death if timely action is not taken (by friends, medical personnel, etc.). At this point, the level of alcohol in the blood is very high. The toxic effect of the alcohol causes a drop in body temperature and a loss of muscle tone. Breathing also becomes more difficult.

It's not the same for teenagers and adults

Response to alcohol varies according to body weight, the regularity with which you drink, the number of drinks you have and how quickly you drink.

A slim teenager who rarely drinks and then drinks on an empty stomach will get drunk very quickly. Teens do not tolerate alcohol as well as older people and they are not as familiar with its effects.

Alcohol can be good for you

Regular, moderate drinking (one or two glasses of wine a day) has been shown to offer some protection against cardiovascular disease, particularly after the age of 40. However, each individual is unique and not everyone is in perfect health. If you have any questions about this, consult your doctor.

Drugs and alcohol are an explosive mix

When mixed with legal medication or illegal drugs, alcohol can have a disastrous effect on your body and your health.

Beer, wine, cider or spirits: a drink is a drink

A can of beer contains the same amount of alcohol as a glass of wine or a shot of liquor (gin, vodka, scotch, etc.).



There are about 13.5 grams of pure alcohol in a standard drink, i.e. :

341 ml (12 oz.) of regular beer (5% alcohol)

341 ml (12 oz.) of cider (5% alcohol)

142 ml (5 oz.) of table wine (12% alcohol)

43 ml (1.5 oz.) of liquor (40% alcohol).

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: the physiological effects of alcohol

How can you tell if your child has a drinking problem?

Your pre-teen or teen may begin behaving differently, but alcohol may not necessarily be the cause.

Even if you are an attentive parent, it's not always easy to know whether your child has a serious problem or if it is a temporary behaviour problem related to puberty, heartache or even exhaustion (due to excessive schoolwork, too many after-school activities, a part-time job, etc.).

If you're not sure and you are having difficulty reading the signs, start by speaking frankly with your child. Be sure to choose the right time. The suggestions under *If you found yourself in these situations, what would you say?* will be helpful.

The important thing is to keep the trust and dialogue alive. Avoid broadcasting your anxiety by watching over the child all the time. Here are a few warning signs to watch for:

- abrupt mood swings for no apparent reason;
- a tendency to spend a lot of time alone or closed up in his room;
- frequent lateness;
- unjustified absences;
- significant change in school performance;
- loss of interest in friends, sports, entertainment;
- loss of appetite;
- depressed behaviour;
- excessive day-dreaming;

- restlessness or fatigue;
- money disappearing from your wallet;
- abnormal negligence with regard to clothes and personal hygiene;
- running away;
- skipping classes (sporadically or for extended periods).

All of these signs will not necessarily appear at the same time. Talk to your teen, explain what's going on and help him understand his own feelings and behaviour better. If necessary, do not hesitate to get help.

If you have a problem, don't keep it to yourself. You may feel angry, sad or guilty. Speak about it with someone you are close to – a friend, a relative who may be able to help you to see things more clearly. You should not hesitate to consult. There are some problems that are beyond your ability to solve on your own.

Get help if...

- your teen is having serious problems;
- talking is no longer possible, despite your best efforts;
- you are no longer in control of the situation;
- you have discussed things with teachers and still can't resolve the problem;
- the situation persists.

WHAT YOU SHOULD SAY to children, whatever their age

What you say is almost as important as what you do. Your children watch what you do and hear what you say, and home is where they first learn how to behave.

Straight talk is best

- You can start talking about drinking with your children naturally, and as simply as possible.
- Don't use an authoritarian tone and avoid sermonizing.
- Be clear and concise. Explain the facts about drinking and discuss the pros and cons. Don't protect them because they are "too young," but don't go out of your way to scare them, either.

Speak calmly

A relaxed attitude and open dialogue with your children can make an enormous difference. If your kids feel comfortable talking to you, you will be better able to guide them in their choices when it comes to drinking. Tell them that they can count on you if they need help. This may be a significant source of support when they are experiencing difficulty.

How to support them?

The best way to support your children is by being attentive and loving, and demonstrating your affection. Tell them often that you love them, even if you're sure they know it. Remember that teens who get a lot of support are less likely to develop a regular drinking habit.

Should you "teach" your children to drink?

It's important for your kids to know that they don't have to drink to enjoy themselves. They should also know that it is possible to drink and enjoy themselves if they stay in control at all times and thus don't become dependent on alcohol.

If they are going to drink, tell them...

- to eat while they're drinking;
- not to empty their glass in one shot;
- to take their time to taste and appreciate what they are drinking.

Talk to them about the consequences of alcohol abuse

So that they can avoid:

- losing control of themselves;
- doing things they will regret later;
- becoming violent and provoking violent behaviour among friends and siblings;
- blacking out or forgetting what happened;
- the danger of a serious accident if they drive;
- becoming seriously ill;
- having to miss school and/or work;
- losing consciousness;
- respiratory arrest and death.

Explain what happens when you drink when you're young

After the first drink or two:

- you relax, you feel less self-conscious, talk more;
- you feel less stressed;
- you get bolder and want to be noticed.

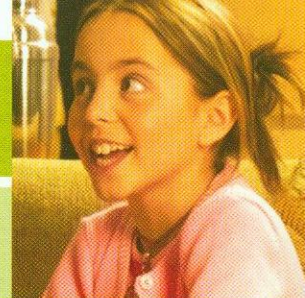
After more drinks:

- you become more sentimental, more excited, a little euphoric;
- your emotions can rise to the surface and make you very sensitive;
- you don't feel quite like yourself anymore.

And then:

- your judgment is less sound, you don't speak as clearly, you don't walk as steadily;
- you see double;
- you may become aggressive;
- you may forget to use a condom and end up having sexual relations you later regret;
- you may go overboard, behave like an idiot and act inappropriately;
- you may vomit, assault someone, fall into an alcohol coma.

WHAT YOU SHOULD SAY to 8 to 11-year-olds



If you found yourself in these situations, what would you say?

1 You are a single mom with two kids, 9 and 11. It's summertime and your next-door neighbours invite some of the families on the street for a barbecue. These neighbours are very relaxed about drinking, even among pre-teens, saying that it's better for the kids to drink when their parents are around. The atmosphere is fun and friendly. Everyone is offered beer. Your 11-year-old wants one and your 9-year-old wants a taste. You are absolutely against this. You feel the social pressure. Your hosts see nothing wrong, since the adults are around. The other neighbours feel the same way and let their pre-teens have a small glass. Nobody shares your opinion.

How do you react?

It's not always easy to stand up for what you believe when everyone else in the group seems to think otherwise. Differences of opinion are sometimes irreconcilable. What's more, some people, with all the best intentions as friends or good neighbours, see you as the "odd man out" and have all kinds of advice for you on how to deal with this issue.

Be firm. Your decision has been made. Own it. Tell your children (again) that you do not agree with this approach. Remind them of what you have said on the subject, and of your agreement (if you have one with them). Tell them you have not changed your mind. This is not the time to give them a speech about the dangers of alcohol; they probably won't listen. Nor is it the time to lecture the other adults about moderation.

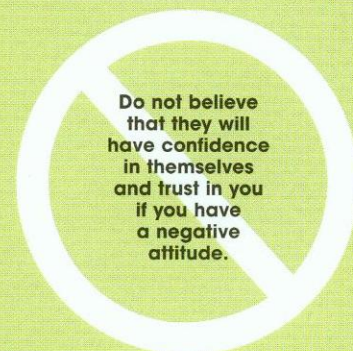
Most importantly, talk to your children at home before situations like this arise. They will know exactly what you want and understand what you expect. This can help head off whining and disappointment. Moreover, your calm attitude will not go unnoticed by your neighbours, who will see that you are not going to change your mind.

You may go ahead and explain your reasons to your hosts, if you think this will be well received and differences of opinion will be respected. But don't waste your breath justifying yourself.

Once you get home, feel free to discuss the incident with your children and remind them of what you believe is acceptable and what you do not accept when it comes to drinking, as well as the consequences

of breaking your rules. Explain your reasons and ask them questions to make sure that they have understood clearly. This exchange will give them the chance to feel that they have been understood. Finally, don't be afraid to break the relationship that you have.

Tell them straight out that you understand how hard it is to say "No," and then add that they don't have to justify and explain themselves. The trust you have in each other is more important than anything. And remember: remaining affectionate while also exercising control requires dynamic communication between parents and children.



2 You notice that the levels in the bottles of liquor in the house are dropping, even though you haven't been drinking. You check it out, and discover that your 10-year-old son has been drinking on the sly.

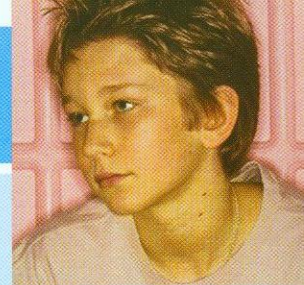
Are you going to stand for this?

It's up to you. However, even if you are angry, try to stay calm when speaking to your child. Only you know what you have said to him about drinking. Repeat your explanations, if necessary, or start explaining immediately if you haven't discussed it yet. Ask questions to make sure he understands. Be firm but gentle. Don't scare him, but don't back down.

Try to find out why he is drinking secretly like this. Don't jump to conclusions. Just because he's done this, does not mean you have a future alcoholic on your hands. It may just be a little bravado. Maybe he thinks you are too rigid and he's afraid of your reaction if he says he just wants to see what it tastes like. Some parents allow their children to taste a little beer or wine when they are around, in the hope that this will prevent them from trying it in secret.

It's up to you to figure out what has led to this behaviour. Try to keep the dialogue going, and be vigilant. Remember, too, that excessive strictness and control can provoke serious rebellion and aggressive behaviour that may end up expressed in excessive drinking.

WHAT YOU SHOULD SAY to 12 to 14-year-olds



If you found yourself in these situations, what would you say?

1 Your neighbour tells you that sometimes when you are away on weekend evenings, your 12 and 14-year-old children invite friends over. They bring beer and things get noisy. They don't pay much attention to your youngest, who is eight and has to put up with the situation. Because the kids clean up so well, you have never suspected anything.

How do you react?

These children are not old enough to drink yet and it is illegal for anyone to sell them alcohol. That means they have either obtained their beer illegally or adults have provided it.

This is the time for some honest dialogue with your kids. It's not a bad idea to speak to all three of them at the same time.

Acknowledge that different ages mean different behaviours. Hear the kids out, even if they contradict themselves, get angry or become aggressive. They will feel that they will have been listened to. Keep control of the situation but stay calm. Raising your voice won't help; they will simply raise theirs and communicating will be all the more difficult.

Tell your young teens what you think is acceptable with regard to drinking. Explain the difference between everyday behaviour and special family occasions when you let them have a sip of your drink, if you do. They should know your feelings, concerns and, most of all, what you expect of them when it comes to drinking.

Offer your support and the means to avoid feeling compelled to do what everyone else is doing, pointing out that while some kids their age do drink illegally, most of them don't. Tell them to suggest that the gang do something else instead of drinking. If the others refuse, your children should ask them to leave the house.

You may also establish specific consequences if they don't follow the rules (consequences are for you to define, e.g. grounding, restricted television privileges, etc.).

This experience shocks you into realizing that you have to keep a closer eye on your kids. They're growing up; they want to experiment with new sensations, act older and defy adults. You have to decide whether they should be left alone when you are out.

You may want to speak to the parents of the friends of the older two. They probably feel the way you do and you can all work together on this. If this is not the case, better to find out now so you can keep your kids from spending too much time with the friend or friends who are having a bad influence.



Choose
the right moment
to talk to them.
Listen to what
they say and
keep your cool.



Do not bring up
the issue at
the breakfast
table just before
everyone leaves.

Do not do all
the talking
and above all,
don't sermonize.

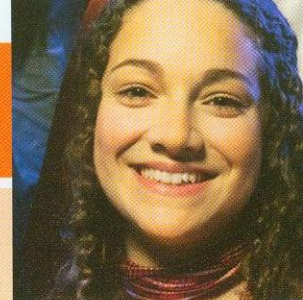
2 Your 13-year-old son often goes to the home of his good friend. You find out that this friend's parents both have a serious drinking problem. In your circle of family and friends, people drink moderately and nobody has a drinking problem. You don't want your son to have to deal with this at his age.

How do you react?

This is a delicate situation because not only is your son involved, but his friend may well be having trouble too. You can either forbid your son from seeing this friend, which will not be easy for either one of them, or sit your son down and explain what happens when people abuse alcohol (see The physiological effects of alcohol). Suggest that the two friends get together at your home only. This solution may be a relief for your son: the embarrassing and difficult situations his friend has to deal with probably make him uncomfortable too.

Not all children of alcoholics become alcoholics themselves and your option may help the friend feel understood and respected, despite his problem.

WHAT YOU SHOULD SAY to 15 to 16-year-olds



If you found yourself in these situations, what would you say?

1 Your 16-year-old daughter comes home from a party and tells you that some kids really drank a lot and there was some violence and glasses got broken. Some people threw up and one girl got so drunk she passed out. They put a cold towel on her forehead. Your daughter didn't drink, did not like this and she was very uncomfortable not knowing what to do.

What do you say?

You should be pleased that your daughter feels comfortable enough to tell you all this; it shows that the trust and communication are working. Don't forbid her from seeing these people again or try to keep her from her friends. Keep trusting her. She behaved well and should be encouraged to continue doing so. Above all, don't reject her whole gang out of hand. They are very important to her.

Help her find solutions for dealing with situations she feels unable to handle. Suggest ways for her to turn down parties where there's a lot of drinking, or leave if things turn bad. Since she doesn't drink, she should simply say no – naturally, but firmly – when offered alcohol. All she has to say is that she doesn't want to; there is no need for any further explanation or justification.

She should be able to enjoy herself without drinking while respecting those in her crowd who choose to drink. It is important for her to express what she really wants.

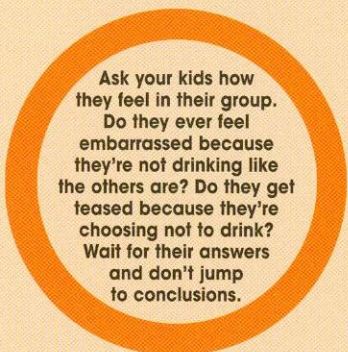
If the kids she is hanging out with start drinking too much and get stupid and sloppy, she can go join another group of friends who think more like she does and are comfortable with her choices. At parties, kids dance, eat, talk and enjoy socializing. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to talk to people who are drinking too much. But she can let them know that their behaviour is bothering her.

Later on, when they are sober, she can speak to them about it again, if she wants to.

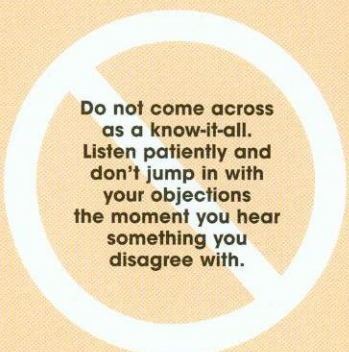
If things really deteriorate, she needs to be able to leave. Tell her:

- to call and you will come pick her up;
- whom to call if you are not home;
- when to call an ambulance (the girl who passed out was in danger, and her friends should have known it).

Make sure that your daughter is comfortable with the solutions suggested and that she agrees. If your daughter finds herself in a similar situation again with the same group of kids, you have to help her find other activities or another gang of friends. It's up to you to decide whether other parents need to be contacted. Your daughter needs to know you are there for her and that she can count on you.



Ask your kids how they feel in their group. Do they ever feel embarrassed because they're not drinking like the others are? Do they get teased because they're choosing not to drink? Wait for their answers and don't jump to conclusions.



Do not come across as a know-it-all. Listen patiently and don't jump in with your objections the moment you hear something you disagree with.

2 Recently, your 15-year-old son went to a party with some friends from school. You know your son well and you notice he seemed distressed afterwards. You speak to him and find out that, at this party, almost everyone was drinking. Your son had only one drink, but there was a lot of pressure on him to drink more, especially from his best friends. He now worries every time there's a party, torn between wanting to be with his friends and hating the pressure they put on him.

What do you say?

Get to know your son's friends and their parents, and be aware of where he is – and with whom – at all times. Know what he's doing and how he's behaving. Even if you have a busy schedule, find the time to talk to your son and let him know you're available if he needs you; you need to ensure that there is a climate of openness and trust between you.

Whatever you do, don't make disparaging remarks about his friends and don't pass judgment on them until you know them. Encourage your son to hang out with kids whose parents have attitudes and beliefs with regard to drinking similar to yours. You don't have to be friends with the parents; you just want to avoid conflicts of values that can create difficult situations.

At parties that are not in your home, make sure an adult is present and that the kids are not left entirely on their own. Don't be shy; call the house and find out for yourself, even if your kids beg you not to and are mortified at the thought of what their friends will think of them, or of you. Explain why you are calling and don't be swayed. Speaking about your concerns with other parents of teens whom you trust can be helpful and can reassure you.

WHAT YOU SHOULD SAY to 17 to 18-year-olds



If you found yourself in these situations, what would you say?

1 Grad night is coming up and you're wondering if you should call the parents of the girl whose home your daughter is going to after the dance, to talk about drinking and how they are planning to handle it. Your daughter says she's not a child anymore and she definitely does not want you to call. While she is out, you call the other girl's mother. She says she's not worried about it: if the kids drink too much, she and her husband won't let them leave and will have them sleep over.

What do you say?

Grad night is a big deal and there is a lot of excitement leading up to it. Most parties do not end up in a drunken free-for-all. True, sometimes the kids go overboard and there have been some tragic accidents.

That's why you have to talk to your daughter about it. Some teens promise not to drink too much. If she is one of them, ask her how she feels about her promise: if she's embarrassed about not doing like the others who plan to drink a lot; if she's worried that they'll make fun of her. Be straight and honest to allow for open dialogue.

Don't be afraid to express your concerns. Tell her what you expect of her. Suggest that she call you if she's worried that people are not going to be able to get home safely. Of course, that is supposing you do not want her to sleep over at the friend's house. There's a difference between this kind of invitation and the sleep-overs kids normally have. You may have good reasons for wanting your daughter to come home when the partying is over.

You know your daughter and you know how strict you have to be with her. Don't be afraid that setting limits will drive a wedge between you. Some parents, even with young children, say yes to everything or keep their opinions to themselves for fear that their children won't love them as much or that they'll grow apart too quickly. The fact is that children and teenagers need and appreciate structure and guidance, even if they don't realize it. Nevertheless, try to be flexible and be prepared to make reasonable compromises.

Some creative solutions have been introduced to prevent grad night disasters. At one high school, during the banquet, the principal went around to each table and handed each student an attractive little package containing a quarter. It was a symbolic gesture, of course, but one everyone understood. At other schools, the kids rent buses to take them back to the school after the dance, and their parents pick them up there. Some parents also give their kids cell phones so they can call if they need to.

2 **Your husband's son went to a party on his college campus last Saturday. You learn from another parent that he drank a great deal very quickly, passed out and fell down. When he came to, he threw up and felt terrible. This parent's son brought him home. You were asleep and were not aware of anything. The next morning, the boy said nothing. When you find out, you tell your husband, because you think he's the one who should speak to his son. Your husband reacts badly, convinced that such a thing could not have happened to his son.**

What would you say if you were the father?

It's best to face the facts: the kid drank too much and got drunk. When you feel composed enough to speak to him without losing your cool or expressing too much disappointment in your son, who has just been through a difficult time, sit down and talk to him. Try to find out exactly what happened. Listen to his version of the story. Maybe he was under a lot of pressure from his friends and wanted to impress them. Maybe this was the first time he ever drank, or maybe he's been drinking before and you just didn't know it. Be sure you understand all the facts and underlying circumstances.

Without assuming unnecessary guilt, ask yourself whether you informed him properly about what happens when you drink too much. Explain to him (again, if necessary) the effects of alcohol on the body. What happens to him will depend not only on how much he drinks, but how quickly he drinks, how tired he is, how much he weighs, etc. A young person who is not used to drinking will get drunk quickly, especially on an empty stomach (go over *The physiological effects of alcohol with him*).

You can give him advice without backing down. He probably feels bad enough as it is and doesn't need another sermon. What he needs is your support, which he'll sense from the loving connection you establish with him. Teenagers who feel close to their parents identify with them and are less likely to fall into destructive behaviours.

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Contact Information

For further information on how you can help your children make responsible decisions about alcohol, you can contact Health & Social Services, Family Resource Centres, Help and Crisis Lines in your local community.

Kids Help Phone

1 800 668-6868

Parents Help Line

1 888 603-9100

Northstar Employee and Family Assistance
Counselling and Crisis Line

1 800 268-7708

