Parent Toolkit:
How to Talk with Your Kids about Alcohol

You are the most important person in your child’s life.
Kids whose parents talk to them about not using alcohol and drugs are up to 50% less likely to use than those who don’t.¹

About This Kit

As a parent, there are going to be times when you need help discussing issues both big and small. That’s why we created the Parent Toolkit with ideas on how to start talking to your child about underage drinking. You are the most important person in your child’s life. The more you talk with your kids about not drinking, the more you can influence and encourage them to make healthy choices that will help them succeed in life.

¹ Partnership Attitude Tracking Survey, The Partnership at Drugfree.org
The Facts

“Binge drinking” is defined as drinking 5 or more drinks on one occasion; About 90% of the alcohol consumed by youth under age 21 in the U.S. is in the form of binge drinking.²

One-third of Denver’s middle and high school youth reported using alcohol in the past month.³

46% of Denver students in 11th grade reported binge use in the past month, compared to 30% state-wide and 28% nationally.³

40% of Denver’s middle and high school students reported that alcohol is somewhat or very easy for them to obtain; Rates of binge drinking increase as students report access becoming easier.³

² Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
³ Healthy Kids Colorado Survey 2008-2009, Denver sample
Why is it important to talk to your child about alcohol?

- Kids whose parents talk to them about not using alcohol and drugs are up to 50% less likely to use than those who don’t

- You’re proud of your child and want to do what you can to help them be their best

  - It’s **illegal** for kids under 21 to drink, so they can get in trouble with the law if they do drink

  - Alcohol **affects brain development**, which can lead to lower grades, dropping out of school, and decreased decision-making skills

  - Drinking can increase the likelihood of **serious injury**; alcohol is a factor in the four leading causes of death among youth ages 10 – 24: motor vehicle crashes, unintentional injuries, homicide, and suicide

  - Alcohol is **addictive**; research shows that youth who begin drinking before age 15 are 4 times more likely to develop alcohol-related problems later in life
Teachable Moments

Talking to your kids about not using alcohol is one of the most powerful tools you can use to protect and connect with them. Finding the right opportunities to bring the topic up can be tough. Here are some easy ways to start talking with your child about the risks of alcohol.
Everyday Examples to Start the Conversation

**The Movies:** You just finished watching a movie with your children in which the main character, José, drinks excessively. This gives you an opportunity to discuss the film and the lead character’s behavior with your children. You can start the conversation by asking them what they thought of José’s alcohol use. “Did you think he was cool?” “Why do you think José drank so much?” This is also a good time to let your child know what YOU think of excessive drinking. Be clear with your expectations for your children around underage drinking.

**A Celebrity:** Your son or daughter’s favorite star was just in the news for going into treatment for his/her alcohol addiction. You can open a conversation with your child by expressing concern for the star’s image as a role model and sympathy for their addiction. You can help your child identify other positive role models including relatives, neighbors, or celebrities who avoid alcohol or choose to use it responsibly.

**A Friend:** A few teens in your child’s school were caught driving after they had been drinking. Discuss with your son or daughter the dangers of driving after drinking, the consequences of getting caught, and the reasons you never want your child to get into a car with a friend who has been drinking. Let your child know that if s/he is ever in a situation where there isn’t a safe way to get home, you will always be there to pick your child up and get him/her home safely.
Answering the Tough Questions

When you start talking with your kids about alcohol, they’ll likely have some questions for you. What happens when your child asks you about your past? For many parents it’s tough to answer the question, “Did you ever drink when you were younger?” Unless the answer is an honest “no,” most parents stammer through a response and leave their kids feeling like they haven’t learned anything, or that their parents are hypocrites.
The conversation doesn’t have to be awkward, and you can turn your child’s question into a teachable moment. Here are three easy tips how:

1. **Honesty is the Best Policy**
   Give an honest answer to your child’s question. Kids know that most adults have drunk alcohol; by giving an honest answer you can build trust between you and your child.

2. **Keep it Simple**
   Don’t divulge every detail about your past. As with conversations about sex, some details can and should remain private; avoid giving your child more information than what s/he asked for. Use accurate information, like the fact that alcohol and violence are connected, when talking about your past. For example, “I would get angry and want to fight when I drank. It just wasn’t worth getting that mad at myself or my friends.”

3. **Ask Questions**
   Ask questions of your child in return. This will help you understand why s/he may be asking these questions and can help open up a conversation about why you don’t want your child to drink.
What to Do & Say

You’re teaching your children valuable skills by helping them resist peer pressure and turn down alcohol offered to them. Acting out tough situations with your child is a fun way to teach them some good excuses to use when they’re feeling pressure to drink. Let them know that sometimes humor can be a great way to ease the tension of the tough situation of being asked by their friends to drink alcohol.

When talking with your children about how to turn down offers to drink, encourage them to stay R.E.A.L.

**REFUSE** – State firmly and clearly that they don’t want to drink

**EDUCATE** – Give an example of what could happen if they do drink

**AVOID** – Suggest something else to do instead of drinking

**LEAVE** – Leave the situation if they’re still feeling pressured to drink
Good Excuse!
At the Party

When helping your child know what to say to turn down alcohol, help him or her develop firm, but friendly responses. Acknowledge that your child’s friends may or may not like your child’s decision to not drink, but reaffirm that good friends respect healthy choices.

Your child goes to a party at a friend’s house and someone has brought a bottle of vodka to drink. The other kids start to drink and your child is asked, “You want some?” Take the role of the child offering the vodka, and your child can practice what to say to turn down the offer. Here are some good excuses your child can use to get out of this tough situation. And remember, stay R.E.A.L.

**REFUSE** – “I can’t. If my mom or dad ever found out, they’d be really upset.”

**EDUCATE** – “No, thanks. I want to stay in control tonight and too much alcohol makes you do stupid things and causes blackouts.”

**AVOID** – “No, that just doesn’t sound fun. What if we went to a movie instead?”

**LEAVE** – “No thanks; my mom just called, so I have to go.”
Good Excuse! At a Sleepover

Peer pressure can be hard to deal with, especially if it’s coming from a good friend. Before your child has to face this situation, you can help him/her practice ways to say “no” to accepting alcohol from friends.

Your child is spending the night at a friend’s house. After eating some pizza and watching movies, your child’s friend says s/he is bored and that the night would be more exciting if they drank. Here are some good excuses your child can use to get out of this tough situation. And remember, stay R.E.A.L.

**REFUSE** – “No, thanks. It’s just not my thing.”

**EDUCATE** – “No way! After a few drinks we’ll just get clumsy and could get hurt doing something stupid; I can’t risk being injured for the soccer game tomorrow.”

**AVOID** – “Nah… isn’t the mall still open? How about we do that instead?”

**LEAVE** – “My mom said she could really use help watching my younger brother tonight. I should go and help her out instead.”
Good Excuse! After School

One of the hardest things for youth to deal with is peer pressure. You can support your children by helping them learn to say no to alcohol and not be embarrassed by it.

Your child and his/her friends always hang out after school. They usually go to a convenience store to get a snack, which is right next to a liquor store. Your child’s friends decide they want to get drunk and try to decide what customers to ask to buy them alcohol. When your child says s/he doesn’t feel like drinking, the other kids try to pressure your child into finding someone to buy for them. Here are some good excuses s/he can use to get out of this tough situation. And remember, stay R.E.A.L.

**REFUSE** – “Nah, I don’t drink, it makes me too sick.”

**EDUCATE** – “No way! I could get into trouble with my parents or even with the cops if I drink. It’s not worth it!”

**AVOID** – “No, I really want to try out this new video game I have. Want to come to my place and play that instead of staying here?”

**LEAVE** – “I can’t! I have to go. I just remembered I was supposed to help make dinner tonight.”
It Takes a Village

Everyone in your family and neighborhood can work together to create a community where your children can grow up and feel good about themselves without drinking. Here are some suggestions of other adults who can support you and your child.
Other Family Members: Everyone in your family can work together to help keep your kids healthy and safe. To make sure they know how to support you, let them know your rules about alcohol. Ask them to respect your rules by never providing alcohol to your child. Also, work together to model responsible alcohol use by not drinking too much at family gatherings or celebrations.

School Staff: Teachers, school counselors, and school resource officers can know a lot about your kids. They may be some of the first people to notice changes in your child. If you’re suspecting something isn’t right, talk to school staff to see if they’ve noticed your child is behaving differently.

Other Parents: The parents of your child’s friends are other adults who can support you in raising a healthy kid. Especially if your kids are good friends, your child may be spending a lot of time at their house. Take the time to get to know your child’s friends and their families, and talk about how you can all work together to prevent underage drinking.
Resources

Online, visit www.drugfree.org or call 1.855.DRUGFREE for more information and tips on talking to your kids about alcohol.

Local Prevention Resources:

- **Denver Parks and Recreation** – call 311 to find the recreation center closest to you

- **Denver Public Libraries** – call 720.865.1111 to find your neighborhood’s branch

- **211** – call this number for non-emergency information about the city, including youth programs, health, and human services related resources

To find out more about FREE, local prevention programs for your child and your family, call 720.944.2TALK (2825)
What Should You Do if You’re Worried About Your Child?

You know that underage drinking is harmful and can lead to sexual assaults, violent acts, and other mental health or behavioral issues. That’s why you do all that you can to help keep your kids from using alcohol. Sometimes despite parents’ best efforts, youth will still use alcohol and develop a substance use disorder. What should you do if you’re worried about your child? Call Metro Crisis Services at 1.888.885.1222 to speak to a trained counselor about the next steps you and your family can take.
Start Talking!

Hard conversations with your kids can be easier if the lines of communication are already open. Use these questions to help spark conversation with your kids. At the dinner table, while you’re shopping, or even in the car — these are great questions to start talking!
What do you like most about our family?

What stresses you out? What are some things you like to do to let off steam?

Who is your favorite teacher? What does s/he do that makes him/her your favorite?

What’s one thing you’ve always wanted to do but haven’t yet?
What's your favorite thing to do together as a family?

What's your favorite thing to do to relax?

What are some of the things you admire about your best friend?

Write your own question to get the conversation started...
This page is all about YOUp!t!

You’re pretty good at handling tough situations, but sometimes, it’s easy to have quick excuses ready to go if you’re feeling the pressure to do something you don’t want to. What should you do to get out of a sticky situation? Just remember to stay R.E.A.L.

REFUSE – “No, thanks. It’s not my thing.”
EDUCATE – “Do you know how much trouble I could get in? Disappointing my parents is bad enough; getting in trouble with the cops would be the worst.”
AVOID – “I really wanted to go shopping this afternoon. Want to come with me instead?”
LEAVE – “I’ve gotta get home soon anyway. I’ll see you later.”

Even if you know how to handle yourself in these situations, there may still be questions you have about alcohol. If you want to talk to your parents about drinking, stress or pressure, or other things you’re dealing with, but you don’t know how to bring up the topic, you can use these questions to help get the conversation going.

➤ What did you do when you were a kid when your friends tried to get you to do something you didn’t want to?
➤ What mistakes did you make when you were my age? What would you have done differently?
➤ What did you and your friends do when you hung out?