

Steps To Keep Your Child Alcohol-Free This Summer

(NAPSA)—Summertime can bring a flurry of social activities for children and teens. Now that school is out, invitations to attend picnics, parties, sleepovers and other events with their friends may be pouring in. And with them comes a greater risk for underage drinking, as alcohol is often present at these events.

First-time alcohol use among kids increases between the months of May and July. However, you don't need to stop your kids from participating in summer events to keep them from drinking. Parents have the power to prevent their children from drinking alcohol—even more than they may realize.

The Dangers of Underage Drinking

Underage drinking is a serious problem in the United States, and often starts much earlier than most parents realize:

- 10 percent of 9- to 10-year-olds have already started drinking.

- More than 20 percent of underage drinkers begin drinking before age 13.

- 92 percent of the alcohol consumed by 12- to 14-year-olds is in the form of binge drinking.

Studies show that children who use alcohol:

- Have higher rates of academic problems and poor school performance compared with nondrinkers;

- Are more likely to be sexually active at earlier ages, to have sexual intercourse more often and to have unprotected sex; and

- Are more likely to have health issues such as depression and anxiety disorders.

Moreover, children who are frequent binge drinkers (nearly 1 million high school students nationwide) are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, including using other drugs such as marijuana and cocaine.

So What Can Parents Do?

Studies show that parents have a significant influence on underage drinking. Many children identify their parents as the leading factor in their decision to drink or not to drink. Here are three steps parents can take to prevent their kids from drinking alcohol:

1. Serve as a positive role model for your child. Do not drink excessive amounts of alcohol. Do not drink and drive. If you suffer from alcohol-related problems, seek professional help.



Parents can keep their kids from drinking alcohol.

2. Monitor your child for signs that may indicate involvement in underage drinking. These signs may include:

- Switching friends, along with a reluctance to let you get to know their new friends,

- Rebelling against family rules,
- A lack of involvement in their former interests,

- Changes in mood, defensiveness, or a “nothing matters” attitude,

- Lapses in memory,

- Bloodshot eyes,

- Lack of coordination, and

- Slurred speech.

3. Last, but not least, talk to your child about drinking. A recent study found that 80 percent of children believe their parents should have a say in whether they drink alcohol. Parents who do not talk to their child about underage drinking may indirectly influence their child's decision.

To help parents start the conversation about underage drinking, download the *Talk. They Hear You.* app, developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The interactive app prepares parents to practice talking to their kids about the risks associated with drinking alcohol. It includes questions to ask and ideas for keeping the conversation going. The free app is available for download on iTunes, Google Play, the Windows Store and the Windows Phone Store. Having a conversation with your child about alcohol may be one of the most important conversations you ever have.

Learn More

For more resources on preventing underage drinking, and to download the app, visit SAMHSA's *Talk. They Hear You.* website at <http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking>.