

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Start Talking! 
Building a Drug-Free Future



Know! April is Alcohol Awareness Month

*The month of April has been designated **Alcohol Awareness Month** as an opportunity to focus attention on America's #1 health problem. This year's theme, sponsored by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCAAD), is "**Changing Attitudes: It's not a 'rite of passage.'**"*

Alcohol is the most commonly used addictive substance among adolescents and adults in our country. As much as we hear in the media about the rise in popularity of popping pills and smoking marijuana, alcohol remains young people's top drug of choice.

If you're sighing in relief after hearing that your students are more likely to drink alcohol as opposed to using other substances, you're not alone. But that is also why this tip is so important, as we address the many negative aspects of underage drinking.

We all know that adolescence is a time of experimentation, and it is very common for people to think of alcohol as a lesser and more acceptable evil – so long as a teen doesn't drink and drive or get in the car with someone who has been drinking. While drinking and driving is extremely dangerous and often deadly, the risks associated with underage drinking go far beyond cars and can be just as fatal.

Underage Drinking:

- **Impairs Judgement:** Drinking can lead to poor decision-making, including loud and unruly behavior and property destruction.
- **Leads to Risky Sexual Behavior:** Alcohol plays a significant role in risky sexual behavior, including unwanted, unintended, and unprotected sexual activity, as well as sex with multiple partners – increasing the risk for unplanned pregnancy and for contracting sexually transmitted diseases.
- **Increases the Risk of Physical and Sexual Assault:** Underage youth who drink are more likely to carry out or be the victim of a



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physical or sexual assault.

- **Interferes with Brain Development:** The adolescent brain, which continues to grow and develop into a person's mid-twenties, is negatively impacted by alcohol, potentially affecting both brain structure and function in the short and long term.
- **Increases the Risk of Alcohol Problems Later in Life:** Research shows that young people who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol use disorders at some point in their lives.
- **Leads to Problems at School:** Skipping school, learning problems, and academic failure are all associated with underage drinking.
- **Impacts Health:** Alcohol is known to cause a range of physical health consequences from hangovers to alcohol poisoning. Ongoing heavy use of alcohol into adulthood is linked to numerous chronic diseases, neurological impairments, and social problems.
- **May Lead to Further Substance Use:** Research shows that underage drinking is associated with additional substance use, including the use of tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs.
- **Causes Unintentional Injuries:** Young people who consume alcohol are at greater risk for getting hurt from falls, burns, and drowning while under the influence.
- **Causes Fatalities:** According to the CDC, the four main causes of alcohol-related deaths among adolescents are motor vehicle crashes, homicides, suicides, and unintentional injuries that result in death. We have clear evidence as to why underage drinking should not be taken lightly or considered a lesser evil. The consequences can be life-altering, extremely risky, and can lead to death in a number of ways. It is essential to the health and well-being of our youth that we – as parents and other caring adults – change the way we think of underage drinking and the approach we take with our children on the subject.

In the tip to follow, we will discuss what we can do to help prevent underage drinking and protect our children.

Sources: [Centers for Disease Control: Alcohol and Public Health – Underage Drinking. Oct. 20, 2016.](#) [John Hopkins, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth \(CAMY\): Consequences of Underage Drinking.](#) [National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence \(NCAAD\): Alcohol Awareness Month 2018.](#) [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\): Alcohol Facts and Statistics 2017.](#)

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