



## TALKING TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT...



# Alcohol

## When “Social Drinking” Becomes Addiction

**A**lcohol is America’s most abused drug. Studies show that over 90 percent of high school seniors have tried alcohol. It may be easier for teenagers to “just say no” to illegal drugs than to alcohol. Beer parties have long been an accepted part of high school culture. Teenagers may also believe the myth that beer and wine coolers are less intoxicating than hard liquor. All this means that your teenager is more likely to be involved with alcohol than with any other drug.

### Risks of Alcohol Abuse

Drunk driving is the most immediate threat that alcohol poses to teenagers. Prom or graduation night celebrations too often turn into tragedy for teens who don’t realize how severely alcohol can slow their reactions and impair their judgment. Bad judgment can make the drinker act in ways he later regrets. A teenager may get into a fight with a friend or engage in unsafe sex while under the influence of alcohol.

If your son or daughter develops a steady drinking problem, more risks follow. Long-term drinking can damage the liver, kidney,

heart and brain. It can also make it difficult or impossible to hold a job or to maintain a marriage.

### Communication Strategies

If you think your teenager may have a drinking problem, try not to react with anger and accusations. If he or she comes home drunk, for example, wait until the next morning to discuss it. Being confrontational will probably make your teen defensive and rebellious. Instead, explain that you’re extremely concerned for his or her health and safety, and you want to help. Describe the risks of drinking and offer your understanding and support. Listen to your teen’s concerns. Many teens simply fear that refusing to drink will make them social outcasts.

### Alcoholism In the Family

Medical researchers think that, in some cases, alcoholism can be hereditary. Whether this is true, there are many families in which several members have a drinking problem. This can complicate the situation if a child becomes alcoholic as well. In cases like this,

putting the blame on an alcoholic parent can be as unhelpful as ignoring the drinking. Propose that the whole family seek help from an organization such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Al-Anon, which is for nondrinking family members.

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