

# a healthy balance

## Did you know your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) could help?

### Teens and Alcohol: Is it “social drinking” or a serious addiction?

Alcohol is America’s most abused drug. And although many teens can “just say no” to illegal drugs, studies show that more than 90 percent of high school seniors have tried alcohol. Beer parties have become an accepted part of high school culture, and drinking alcohol has long been associated as one of the rites of passage to adulthood. But too often, what appears as innocent “kids will be kids” fun may actually be dangerous – even deadly. Parents should be aware of the signs of teen drinking, and be prepared to address the issues and, if necessary, get their children help.

### What’s the harm in a little social drinking?

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 impair their judgment and slow their reactions. Impaired judgment also can make the drinker act in other ways he or she will later regret. While under the influence, a teenager may get into a fight with a friend or engage in unsafe sex – acts they will regret once they are sober.

More risks follow if your child’s “social drinking” develops into a steady drinking problem. Long-term drinking can damage the liver, kidneys, heart and brain. And as your child gets older, it can also make it difficult or impossible to hold a job or to maintain a marriage.

### What should I do?

If you suspect your child is drinking, 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.

### What if I suspect a more serious addiction?

If you think your teenager may have a drinking problem, getting him or her help now could save his or her life.

Medical researchers think that, in some cases, alcoholism can be hereditary. Whether or not 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.

Regardless of your family situation, propose that the whole family seek help from an organization such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Al-Anon, which is for non-drinking family members.

Helping families deal with teenage drinking and alcohol abuse is just one way your EAP can help its members. For more information, call your confidential EAP any day, any time, for free assistance, resources or a referral to help resolve your concerns.

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