

# POWER OF PARENTS®

HIGH SCHOOL PARENT HANDBOOK

**Talking With Your High Schooler  
About Alcohol, Cannabis, and Other Drugs**

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# How To Use This Handbook

Because underage drinking and substance use poses special risks to young people and is illegal, this handbook urges parents to:

## USE THE STRATEGIES

recommended to talk with your child about alcohol, cannabis, and other substances, even if they don't seem interested in experimenting.

## MARK PASSAGES

that mean the most to you and commit to regularly using what you learn here.

## PRACTICE AND PERFORM

the exercises and see what beneficial changes come about.

## USE THE DISCUSSION TOPICS

suggested to have meaningful, frequent conversations with your teen.

Throughout this handbook, you will see the words “parent” and “child” used when referring to you, the caring adult, and the youth in your life you want to protect. However, MADD recognizes and cherishes all kinds of families; those made up of legal guardians, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or others who may be reading this to learn how to support youth. We honor and appreciate you for reading and helping us prevent underage substance use.

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## Acknowledgements

Mothers Against Drunk Driving® is grateful to Robert Turrisi, Ph.D., and his colleagues at The Pennsylvania State University for their partnership in this handbook. Dr. Turrisi has spent decades researching how parents can talk effectively with teens about alcohol and cannabis. This handbook draws from his work and from scientific knowledge in this field from all over the world.

Nationwide is the proud National Presenting Sponsor of *Power of Parents*. “As a company committed to protecting people, businesses, and futures with extraordinary care, there is no more important work that aligns with our values than keeping our roadways, families, and communities safe. Thank you for your commitment to preventing underage substance use and impaired driving. Nationwide is proud to stand with you on this lifesaving mission.”



# Introduction

We created this handbook based on the best information available to help parents and caring adults talk to teens about alcohol and cannabis use, medication misuse, and the dangers of impaired driving. This handbook will improve how you and your teen relate to each other and can help you protect your teen. Since each family is different, you will likely relate to some sections of this handbook better than others. That's ok! Not all families are the same, and we respect those differences. After reviewing the entire handbook, use the parts that are helpful to you and your family.

We urge you not to underestimate how dangerous alcohol, cannabis, and impaired driving are for teens. By following the handbook's suggestions, you can help equip your teen to make smarter, safer choices.

## A MESSAGE TO PARENTS FROM DR. TURRISI AND MADD

Being a parent is intensely rewarding, but also deeply challenging. Despite a common misconception that as children enter high school their friends become all-important and parental influence weakens, research shows that parents are still the most important source of information for older adolescents and young adults. Further, our research shows that parents:

1. **ARE MOTIVATED**  
to talk with their children and teens.
2. **ARE WILLING**  
to learn new ways to reach out to their teens.
3. **DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**  
when it comes to reducing risky adolescent behavior!

Too many teens die or suffer life-altering consequences from drinking underage. In addition, young people under 21 are over-represented in both alcohol-impaired driving and passenger fatalities.

**1 in 3 teens  
combine  
alcohol with  
other drugs**



Studies show that 1 in 3 teens combine alcohol use with other drugs (e.g., cannabis, nicotine and other stimulants) and experience 2 to 3 times more consequences on those occasions! All of these harms and tragedies are 100% preventable.

## You are a “changer.”

YOU have the POWER to change the way your child thinks about alcohol and other drugs. You can improve your parenting and communication style.

## You can even change your child’s future.

All of the best information from decades of studies done in the United States and Europe points to the same thing, with no exceptions – children and teens are safer when there are family rules present.

# FAMILY RULES

1. No alcohol use before age 21
2. No drug use
3. No alcohol or drug impaired driving
4. Never ride with someone who has been drinking or using other drugs

**Breaking News:** With support from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Dr. Turrisi and a team of prominent scientists conducted a clinical trial to examine the effectiveness of MADD’s Power of Parents handbook. 1100 families, representative of the U.S. population, participated in the trial. Dr. Turrisi and his team observed that when parents read the MADD handbook AND discussed its contents with their teens, their teens declined more rides with impaired drivers. It is important to mention that this was only the case when parents discussed almost all of the content of the MADD Power of Parents materials.

See the study for yourself in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.



# Your Teen's World

The changes teens go through affect how they think about alcohol, cannabis and other substances, driving, and getting into cars with friends who drive impaired.

To communicate effectively with your teen about alcohol, cannabis, and other risks, it helps to understand how these changes affect their world.

As a teen learns more about themselves and the world around them, they can often feel alone. While teens strive for independence, it's a parent's job to be there to guide and support them as they discover the challenges of this life. It's important to honor their thoughts and experiences as an individual, while providing insight and wisdom from your own. A teen may assume, "no one has ever felt the way I feel." Because a teen feels unique, if a parent says, "I know how you feel," the teen may reject this as impossible.

Instead of forcing advice on an unreceptive teen, acknowledge their feelings and let them know you respect their perspective. Explain that, as their parent, you care about their well-being and want to have an open conversation with them about their experiences and challenges.



They face new pressures at school and socially.

# It's Biology, not Maturity

Common pushbacks we hear...

*From teens:*

"If I can fight in the war,  
why can't I have a beer?"

*From parents:*

"It's not that big of a deal; she's  
mature for her age. She can  
have a drink now and again."

However, the reason federal law requires individuals to be 21 before they can legally drink alcohol has everything to do with biology, not maturity. You see, your brain is not fully developed until you're in your mid-20s. It's not that teens aren't mature enough to drink alcohol, it's that their brain isn't done developing, and alcohol or other substances severely hinder that growth and development.

Not to mention that dozens of research studies all confirm that the 21 minimum drinking age law protects youth and saves about 800 lives a year.




# Going Along with a Group

Teens include others in their problem solving. If their peers do something, it makes the behavior seem more okay. Teens are less likely to rely on their own standards and values and may justify decisions by saying, “but everyone is doing it.” One reason why your teen is strongly influenced by friends is because peers have a similar level of power in the world. This “level playing field” allows teens to work out problems together, instead of following the advice of a more powerful individual, like a parent or a teacher.

Teens often believe they should be excused for misbehavior if they had not planned to do something wrong. They may say, “We didn’t plan to drink; things just happened.”

You can help them with their thinking and planning by asking them open-ended questions starting with **how, what, and why**. These questions allow kids to develop thinking skills that help them resist in-the-moment emotions (more on that in Chapter 4).



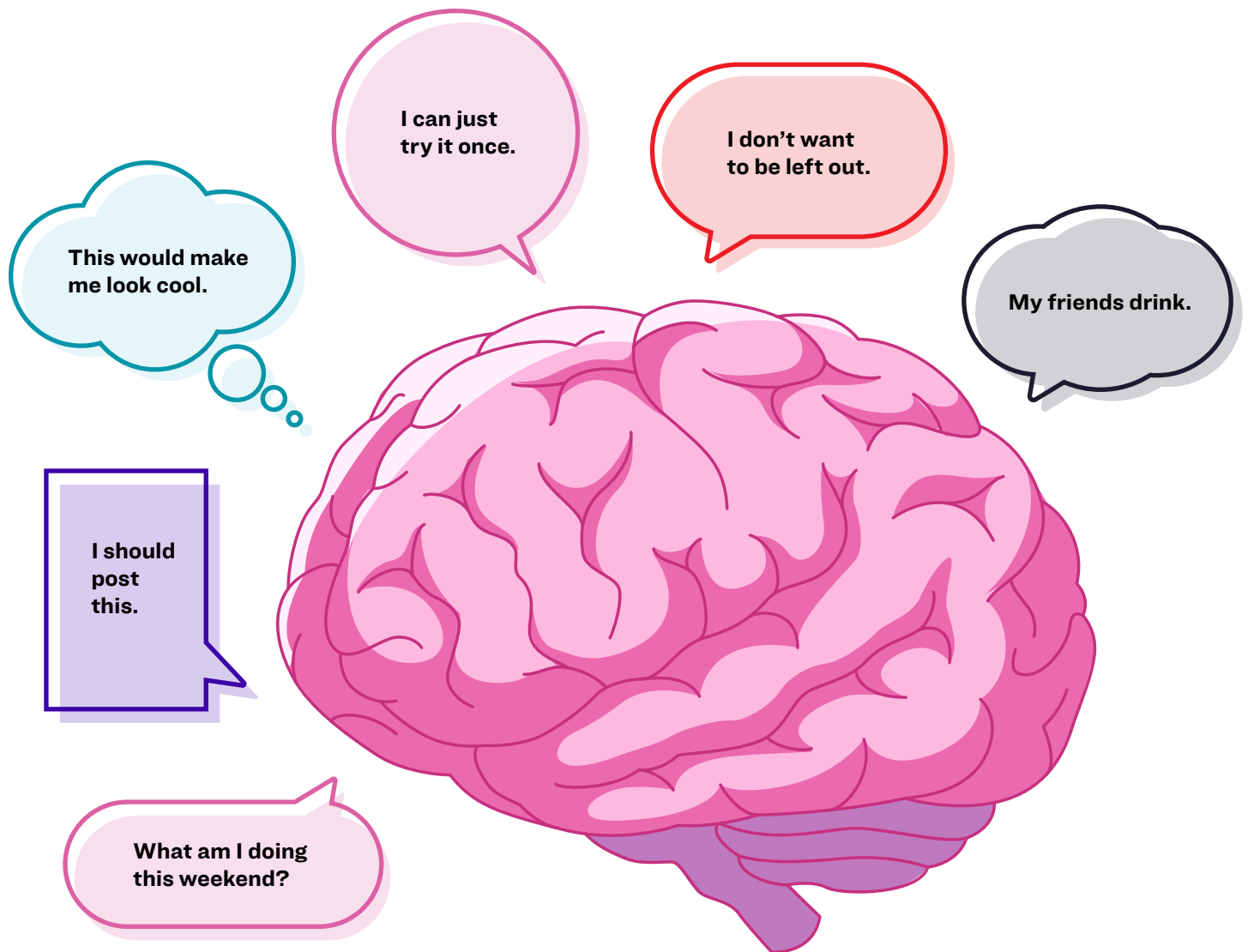
**Research shows:** Studies have consistently shown that helping others reach their own conclusions about the pros and cons of different alternatives is more effective than telling them what is right and wrong. Your children are no different in that way.

## Get Behind **ZERO TOLERANCE LAWS**

Zero tolerance laws reinforce the 21 minimum drinking age law. They make it illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to drive with a measurable amount of alcohol in their blood (a BAC between .00 to .02, depending on the specific law).

Zero tolerance laws can make teens automatically lose their license for underage drinking violations. Avoiding this penalty can motivate young people who value the privilege of driving.

# Short Term Thinking



The teen brain focuses on what's happening right now. Often, when a teen thinks ahead, it usually means they are wondering about what to do this weekend, not next year.

This puts teens at a disadvantage when they face choices about risky behaviors that can have long-term consequences, such as substance-use. That's why talking to them early and often about substances will help them build thinking and planning skills that will help them see further into the future.

Teens may know the potential risks of drinking alcohol or using cannabis but think, "My friends drink and use cannabis and nothing bad has ever happened to them." That friend's experience can have more impact than facts. Do not assume that giving information or statistics is enough to convince your teen not to drink alcohol.

Often, teens believe, "Nothing bad will happen to me." They assume negative things happen to others, not to them.

# The Physical Effects of Alcohol and Cannabis

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), alcohol and cannabis affect the body and brain in different ways, but both can have serious and lasting consequences—especially for teens, whose brains and bodies are still developing.

From the very first drink, alcohol is a depressant that begins to impair judgment, coordination, and reaction time.

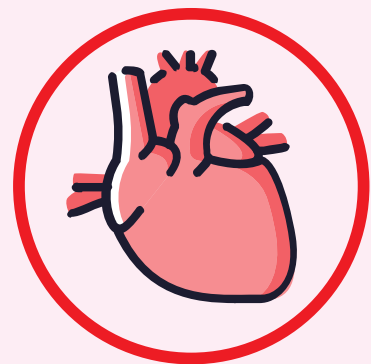
**As more alcohol enters the bloodstream, it slows down critical functions of the body:**



The brain's ability to process information and make decisions



Muscle coordination, balance, and reflexes



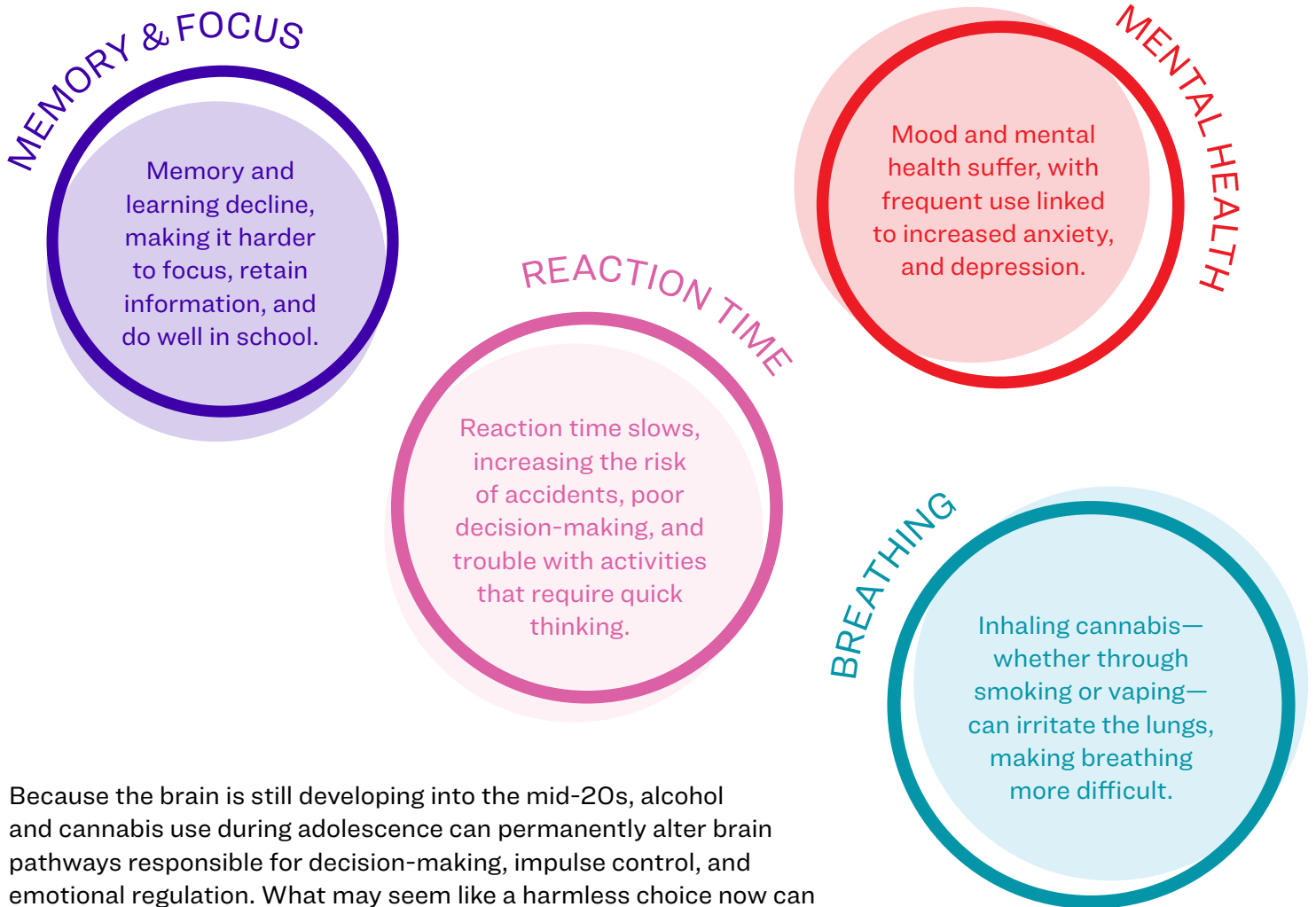
Heart rate and breathing—and in cases of alcohol poisoning, they can stop completely

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For teens, drinking alcohol is even riskier because their bodies absorb alcohol faster than adults, making impairment happen more quickly and severely.

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Like alcohol, cannabis affects judgment, coordination, and reaction time, making activities like driving especially dangerous. However, long term cannabis use is shown to directly interfere with brain development in ways that can last beyond the teen years:



Because the brain is still developing into the mid-20s, alcohol and cannabis use during adolescence can permanently alter brain pathways responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation. What may seem like a harmless choice now can have long-term consequences.

**Breaking News:** Recent studies show that alcohol combined with cannabis results in greater harm than alcohol alone. Some of the noteworthy findings include:

- Teens experience 2 to 3 times the number of consequences on nights when they mix these drugs.
- Teens are more likely to “blackout” (when the individual cannot recall parts of or the whole evening) when they mix substances.
- On a night when a teen blacks out, they are more likely to experience more frequent and severe consequences (such as arrest, sexual assault, injury that requires hospitalization, etc).



## AUTHORITARIAN

# What Style of Parent Are You?

Parents rely on certain strategies for raising their children. Do any of these parenting styles seem familiar to you?

Authoritarian parents tend to use parental power to control their children.

- Teens must do what they are told or else face serious consequences.
- Parents are unconcerned if teens understand the reasons behind rules. Parents don't tolerate teens asking for explanations.
- Parents use threats and punishment to keep teens in line.

By focusing on obedience, authoritarian parents lose their ability to influence their teen through reasoned discussion or to help them develop positive thinking skills.

# 3



## OVERPROTECTIVE

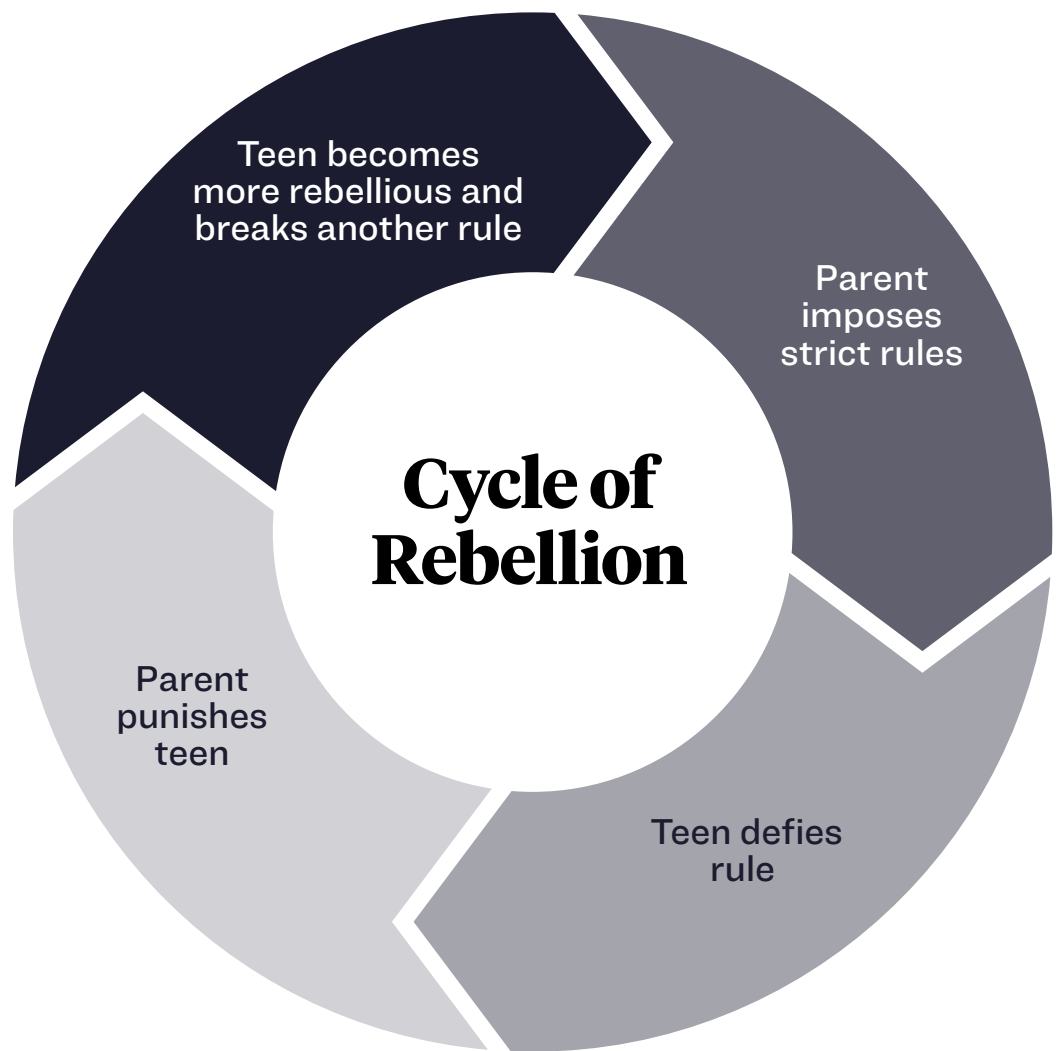
Overprotective parents shield their children from the harsh realities of life. Like authoritarian parents, they exert a lot of control over their children, but their method is different.

- Instead of using rules and threats, overprotective parents present themselves as allies.
- They see the world as a threat and express this fear to their children.

Once the teen gets to their breaking point, feeling as if they could never satisfy their parent, they give up trying and the authoritarian parents lose their influence.

**Research shows:**

*Teens who feel threatened by their parents may behave well when the threatening parent is nearby but act out when that parent is gone. Children of authoritarian parents are less likely to develop internalized values that equip them to make wise decisions.*



- They rescue their children from dealing with any harsh reality.

For example, instead of helping children understand difficult homework assignments, overprotective parents actually do the work for them. This leaves a child poorly prepared to deal with the realities of adult life.

Overprotected children lack experience and may panic in stressful situations. This could present an issue for a teen who doesn't feel empowered to say no when offered alcohol or other drugs, or they assume their parent is being "over the top" when they stress their fears about the dangers of underage substance use.

**Research shows:** *Teens with overprotective parents may struggle with decision-making and independence, making them more vulnerable to peer pressure and risky behaviors.*



## PERMISSIVE

Permissive parents take a hands-off approach.

- They do not set expectations. Instead, they feel teens should be independent.
- They permit their teen to explore the world without “interfering.”
- They feel kids should be free to make mistakes and learn from them accordingly.

Permissive parents may not face as much rebellion as authoritarian or overprotective parents do, but permissive parents deprive their children of wise guidance in developing effective problem-solving skills.

In most instances, permissive parents do so to help their teens. They think that by setting permissive rules their teens will be more honest with them and will tell the truth about their alcohol or cannabis use.

Studies show that teens rarely tell their parents exactly how often and how much they use alcohol. Teens often will grossly under-report risky behaviors to their parents (including alcohol and cannabis use).

**Breaking News:** *Dr. Turrisi and his team have interviewed and surveyed thousands of parents over the past 20 years, and while the majority do not allow their teens to drink alcohol, some parents still let their teens drink alcohol on special occasions, at family gatherings or during holidays, where they can be supervised. Their reasons are they think it teaches teens responsible drinking and/or it takes the mystery away and reduces the likelihood they will try it when parents are not around.*

*There are numerous studies in recent years showing that when parents allow their teens to drink, even small amounts under their supervision, these teens, DO NOT drink responsibly when they are not with their parents. The opposite occurs. They drink more often, in larger amounts, and experience many more consequences than teens whose parents do not allow them to drink. Reviews of the scientific medical, health, and adolescent literatures in the U.S., Europe and Australia fails to find a single well-designed published study showing any health or safety benefits when parents allow their teens to drink or use cannabis regardless of whether in small amounts, on special occasions, or when done under the supervision of an adult.*

**Research shows:**

*Teens of permissive style parents tend to drink more often and heavier, use cannabis and other drugs, and engage in other risky behaviors that can lead to serious consequences. They also report having parents who are less willing to talk with them and have poorer relationships with their parents as a result.*

# There Can Be **LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS**

To serving alcohol to your own child or other people's children. Learn more about Social Host laws in your state to make sure you are following the law.



## POSITIVE

Positive parents focus on empowering their children to grow and learn. They...

- Take an active role in teaching their teen responsibility.
- Tend to use the “how, what, and why” question approach.
- Set clear expectations about teen behavior, such as waiting until age 21 before drinking alcohol.
- Set and enforce rules prohibiting drugs.
- Explain reasons behind their expectations and encourage teens to talk about any concerns.
- Set and enforce consequences when agreements are not met.

Positive parents know that their own age, knowledge, experience, and material resources give them an important role in guiding their children. They use that power to strengthen and protect their teens and help them grow into effective individuals.

Positive parenting can be challenging because parents gradually relinquish control and give kids more freedom and responsibility with each passing year. These parents respect a teen's drive for independence yet maintain firm boundaries. Their philosophy is to build trust and teach skills that empower the teen to take increasing control of their life. Instead of threatening severe punishment for bad behavior, they discuss, set, and enforce clear consequences for breaking rules.

**Research shows:** *Teens with positive-style parents are less likely to drink, use cannabis, or ride with impaired drivers. They also have fewer problems in school and with the law and report better relationships with their parents, when compared to children of other parenting styles.*

# PARENTS DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Despite how it may feel sometimes, research shows that parents are an important influence on whether or not teens choose to drink alcohol, use cannabis or other substances, get into a car with someone who has been drinking alcohol or using other substances, or drive when impaired.

Teens do care about their parents' opinions, and our research proves it. Teens credit their parents with being the most important influence in their decision-making about alcohol.

Many studies show that authoritarian, overprotective, and permissive parenting can lead to negative outcomes, but it is never too late to adopt a new approach to parenting!

## Two Parents, TWO — STYLES?


It's common for parents and partners to have different approaches to parenting. For example, one parent might be stricter and rule-focused (authoritarian), while the other is more protective and nurturing (overprotective). While these differences can sometimes create confusion for teens, they can also present an opportunity to model teamwork and compromise.

**Breaking News:** Dr. Turrisi's team observed that parental orientations towards alcohol consequences significantly influence the quantity and frequency of their teen's drinking and consequences. For example, if teens reported that their parents thought it was normal for them to experiment with alcohol (and experience hangovers), they drank alcohol more frequently and in greater amounts. They also experienced more problems resulting from their drinking.

# Talking About Alcohol

The first step in talking with your teen about alcohol, impaired driving, and riding with friends who drive impaired is simply getting started. Often, the conversation takes more than one sitting and evolves over time. As a parent, you must take active steps to start this conversation. Suggest to your teen that you would like to talk. Don't expect them to agree. In fact, many teens respond negatively.

**Here are some ways to begin:**



“You probably have already heard a lot in school about alcohol and other drugs. I would like to talk with you a little about it. I know things are different from when I was young, and I would not be a good parent if I chose not to talk with you about something so important. Do you mind giving me a few minutes?”

“I know you are smart and know a lot of things. Perhaps you could help me with something that has been on my mind. I keep hearing about how much drinking is going on, and I am a little worried. Maybe if we talked about it I might feel better. Do you mind giving me a few minutes?”

# Starting the Conversation

Communication is most effective when all participants have a feeling of connection and collaboration. The best way to achieve this is by asking for permission to talk.

“There is something that I have been thinking about lately, and I was hoping we could talk about it for a few minutes. Is that okay?”

When the time is right to start talking together, use **“how,” “why,” “what” questions** to help your teen work through different scenarios that could involve alcohol.

Questions that start with “how,” “what,” and “why” can encourage an exchange of ideas. They help teens practice rational thinking about pros and cons of different alternatives. Open-ended questions allow kids to develop thinking skills that help them resist in-the-moment emotions.

Instead of telling them what to do or what is right or wrong, you might ask:

- **How would you handle an invitation to a party where there will be older kids?**
- **What things could you say?**
- **Why do you think drinking alcohol, using cannabis or taking other substances is dangerous?**

By encouraging your teen to think through these situations for themselves, you help them build the confidence and decision-making skills they need to navigate real-life challenges, safely.

***Here are several topics we recommend you discuss with your teen:***

**TOPIC:**

**The physical effects of alcohol on the body**

**HOW**

How do you think drinking helps or hurts your body?

**WHAT**

What physical activities do you want to do in the future that drinking could hurt?

**WHY**

Why do you think some young people drink if they can get hurt?

**TOPIC:**

**How drinking alcohol affects decisions**

**HOW**

How do you think drinking affects choices young people make?

**WHAT**

What problems can happen when young people choose to drink?

**WHY**

Why do you think some young people drink if it can have a negative impact on their choices?

**TOPIC**

**Drinking alcohol before 21**

**HOW**

How does drinking before the age of 21 affect someone?

**WHAT**

What answers could kids give if they're pushed to drink before 21?

**WHY**

Why do you think some people would start drinking before 21?

# Talking So Your Teen Will Listen

The following strategies will help you communicate most effectively:

## Listen.

Allow your child to speak without interruption. Sometimes it's good to paraphrase where you don't agree, or interpret back: "Let me see if I understand you. It sounds like you feel that..."

## Choose a good time.

Pick a time to speak when you can have each other's undivided attention. Don't discuss important things when one of you is absorbed in another activity or has another place to be.

## Communicate directly.

Open the conversation with a direct statement. "I'd like to talk to you about alcohol and other drugs. Is now a good time?"

## Emphasize common goals.

Remind teens that you are on their side. Emphasize common goals and use them as a basis for your guidance and suggestions, i.e. remind your teen that you both want them to stay healthy and safe.

## Avoid communication "stoppers."

These are single, sometimes threatening statements that shut down any response: "I better not catch you drinking."

## Agree to step away.

Agree to temporarily stop talking if things don't go well. Wait until both individuals can talk in a calm, direct fashion. Recognize that conflict is natural.

## Use appropriate body language.

How you position yourself physically while you talk can send important messages about your attitudes or express something you are not trying to convey. Don't look away or slouch down. Nod your head in agreement.

## Avoid debate.

Sometimes a teen feels they must "defend" a position. If you find yourselves debating, try suggesting that you both approach matters from a different angle. Avoid statements that begin with "you" that make the other person feel attacked: "You did this..."

# Reasons Teens Respect

When you speak with your teen about avoiding alcohol, emphasize the following reasons that help many teens choose not to drink:

## REASON 1

### Underage Drinking is Illegal

Most teens know it is illegal to drink under the age of 21. Still, they may assume they won't get caught or they are unfamiliar with Zero Tolerance laws, which prohibit driving after drinking any amount of alcohol. Remind them that police do receive complaints about parties. When police arrive, they may arrest anyone who is suspected of underage substance use.

State clearly that you expect your teen to obey the law. Discuss the potential consequences for breaking the law, such as, the teen could have their license revoked or face expensive legal fees. If a court date is scheduled, you may have to take time off from work and could lose pay.

Teens rarely consider all the possible legal consequences. Discussing the implications of an arrest can help deter underage drinking.

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## REASON 2

### Drinking Can Make You Sick or Pass Out

Alcohol irritates the lining of the digestive system. Drinking too much alcohol can make people vomit and feel bad for days (a condition known as a "hangover"). Other teens don't want to be around someone who is sick or passes out from too much drinking. Remind your teen that alcohol sickness can happen suddenly and with little warning.

## REASON 3

### Drinking May Make You Vulnerable

Teens who are drinking are more vulnerable to dangerous situations and often can't escape or protect themselves from the threat of rape or assault.

Your teen probably trusts the people they are around, and you may trust them too, but alcohol can turn situations dangerous. 85% of women who have been sexually assaulted were assaulted by someone they knew.

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## REASON 4

### Drinking Might Lead to Addiction

No one aspires to have an alcohol abuse problem. Yet most people believe they can control their drinking and will not become an alcoholic themselves.

Research clearly shows, however, that the younger a person starts drinking, the greater the chance they will develop alcohol problems later in life. Adults who started drinking at age 15 or 16 are five times more likely to be diagnosed with alcohol dependence as adults who started drinking after age 21.

# AVOIDING POTHOLES

SOMETIMES TEENS REACT BADLY WHEN PARENTS TRY TO DISCUSS SENSITIVE TOPICS.

## Anger about not being trusted

Some teens interpret a request to talk as a sign that you do not trust them. Reassure your child that you are not suspicious and are doing this to help them, not attack them.

*Teen: "Why don't you trust me?"*

*Parent: "I trust you. But this is a very important issue, and I think we need to make sure we're on the same page. To do that, we need to talk to each other."*

## They think they already know it all

Some teens don't want to talk because they believe they already know everything there is to know about a topic. Don't let this objection stop you from trying to communicate.

*Teen: "I've heard it all before. We don't need to talk."*

*Parent: "You probably already know quite a bit. It would make me feel better if we talked it through. Besides, it would help me to better understand how things are different from when I was your age."*

## Fear of punishment

Teens may fear you'll treat them harshly right from the start. Teens who fear punishment communicate less often with their parents.

*Teen: "Sure, talk with you and you won't let me go out. Forget it."*

*Parent: "I promise that I won't be that way. I will listen to you. I'll take what you say seriously. I'll be straight with you, and you be straight with me."*

# CAUTION!

## Terrifying Your Teen Could Backfire

Be truthful with your teen about risks but avoid overly harsh scare tactics. Too much scary information can make people “turn off” and not pay as much attention. Plus, if you paint a horrific picture of the consequences and your teen doesn’t see them happen immediately when someone they know drinks, they will assume you were wrong or exaggerating.

### Fear of getting a lecture

Teens may be open to talking, but the last thing they want is a one-way lecture from parents about right and wrong.

*Teen: “I know what you will do if we talk. You’ll lecture me like you always do. Then if I argue you will interrupt me.”*

*Parent: “You’re right. This time I won’t lecture. I will listen to what you think.”*

Parents can become overwhelmed, too. Negative reactions from a parent can shut down communication and make it difficult to help a child solve problems and deal with difficult situations. Negative parental reactions could look like:

**Letting off steam in an angry outburst.**

**Recruiting other people to support your side of the argument.**

**Giving the silent treatment and then saying “things are fine.”**

**Comparing kids and asking “why can’t you be more like your brother/sister?”**

**Bringing up the child’s past failures.**

As the adult in the conversation, it’s important to manage your own emotional reactions while also holding space for your teen’s reactions, too.

## “Did You Drink **WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG?”**”

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Honesty is important, and you should not lie to your child if you did drink underage. You could say: “Yes, I did, and I regret it. I want you to be better informed than I was at your age and make safer choices.”

## Communicating Family Values

Many parents teach their children basic family values, such as honesty and responsibility, but don't always connect these values to real-world situations involving alcohol and other substances. They assume their child will naturally apply these principles when making decisions. That's a risky assumption. The teen brain is still developing, and young people don't always make the same logical connections that seem obvious to adults.

That's why it's critical to have open, direct conversations about alcohol, cannabis, and

other substances—reinforcing not just values but also clear expectations and rules. The best way to ensure these conversations happen regularly is by making them a natural part of family discussions. Holding routine family meetings can provide a structured way to talk about important topics, including peer pressure, risky situations, and family rules. Keeping the lines of communication open—starting early and continuing through the teen years—helps teens feel supported, heard, and more willing to share their own thoughts and concerns.

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**Parent Tip:** Keep the conversation about alcohol open, even if your teen says what you want to hear “I don't drink.” **Do:** Talk about alcohol use and how to handle risky situations, regardless of what your teen admits. **Don't:** Skip the conversation about alcohol use, assuming your teen isn't at risk yet.

# Make the following agreements with your teen:

## High Quality Agreements

A good agreement is clear and understood by all. But rules are broken when they only reflect the parent's wishes. Agreements work best within strong relationships built on mutual trust, respect, honesty, responsibility, and care for one another. Teens who feel valued and respected in family discussions are more likely to take these agreements seriously.

At times, you may have to ask for an agreement based on respect for your authority. In those cases, emphasize that your purpose is to protect, not control, and increasing responsibilities will come with time. Framing rules in terms of care and guidance rather than punishment strengthens the foundation of trust between you and your teen.

**No drinking alcohol before age 21.**

**No other drug use.**

**No socializing in places where teens are drinking alcohol or using cannabis.**

**No driving impaired.**

**No riding in a car with a driver who has had any amount of alcohol or cannabis.**

# Enforcing Consequences

Be ready to follow through and enforce consequences if your teen violates a family agreement. Consequences are most effective when built on a foundation of trust and clear expectations. That's why establishing strong parent-teen agreements BEFORE your teen slips up is so important.

## Make sure they understand...

**How you expect them to behave based on your family's rules and values and WHY you take that position.**

**Your position on alcohol and other substances, impaired driving, and riding in a car with an impaired driver.**

**The consequences you will enforce if they break an agreement.**

Emphasize to teens how quickly drinking can lead to dangerous results. That's why you take underage substance use so seriously and are committed to enforcing these consequences to keep them safe.



**DO:** Impose fair, clear consequences. Talk to them about the mistake and make a plan for next time. Be firm and consistent.



**DON'T:** Act out of anger or impose unfair punishments.

## DOES THE PENALTY FIT?

It's best for consequences to match the "crime."

Small violations of family rules deserve mild punishment; serious violations deserve tougher penalties. For example, you could consider curbing a teen's privileges, like driving, curfew, phone rights, or screen time.

## Consider This Scenario:

A teen comes home from a party and has clearly been drinking alcohol. The parent is angry and says, “You’re grounded indefinitely. When you’re not in school, you will be at home.” This consequence is set in a heated moment and may not even be possible to enforce.

### Stay Calm

Another way the parent might respond would be to say, “I’m very disappointed with you. We agreed that there would be no drinking alcohol until you are 21. We will talk about this in the morning.”

### Talk Tomorrow

The next day, the parent might say, “As you know, you violated a very important family rule. Drinking is very dangerous for you. Therefore, as we agreed before, there will be serious consequences. For the next month, you will not be allowed to use the family car, and your curfew will be 9:00 instead of 11:00. I hope that after the month has passed, we will both feel more confident in your ability to follow the rules of this family.”

### Set Consequences

### Focus on Accountability

In this example, the consequences were previously established and are discussed after the parent’s initial disappointment in the teen has subsided. This approach keeps the focus on accountability while reinforcing the trust and structure that help teens make better decisions in the future.

# False Assumptions

Parents sometimes hesitate to impose rules against underage drinking or even to discuss drinking with their teens. Maybe they are embarrassed or assume their child is not at risk.

## Parents Might Assume

*My child is not interested in drinking.*

## Read The Facts

According to data from a Monitoring the Future national survey, about 75% of teens try alcohol outside the home before graduating from high school.

## Parents Might Assume

*My child's friends are good kids who do not drink alcohol.*

## Read The Facts

About 33% of high school seniors have consumed alcohol in the past 30 days.

## Parents Might Assume

*At this point, my child should know better.*

## Read The Facts

Unfortunately, the reality is that many teens don't yet have the life experience to be truly informed on the severity of the dangers of alcohol.

## Parents Might Assume

*My child won't listen to me at this point.*

## Read The Facts

National surveys reveal that parents are the number one source that teens turn to for important information. Parents can influence their teen's decision not to drink alcohol.

## Parents Might Assume

*My child has learned about the negative effects of alcohol in school.*

## Read The Facts

Although most teens do learn about alcohol in their health classes, research shows that many important issues never get covered. School programs alone are not enough to stop teens from drinking.

## Teens Make Assumptions, Too

Teens who binge drink say:

- They don't believe drinking makes you sick or has bad effects.
- They are bored, and there is nothing else to do but drink.
- They expect drinking to have benefits, such as improved socializing.
- "It can't be that bad if everyone is doing it," and "my friends won't think I'm cool if I don't drink."

**Parent Tip:** Keep conversations open and fact-based. Do: Acknowledge their feelings and explore facts together. Don't: Dismiss their thoughts or shut down the conversation.

# YOUNG PEOPLE DRINK DIFFERENTLY

Underage drinkers tend to binge drink. Unlike most adults who may have a drink or two with a meal or at a party, teens drink less frequently—but when they do, they typically drink much more.

## “Binge” Drinking

Teens often engage in intense drinking, called “binge” drinking.

Sometimes, teens plan to binge (saying, for example, “Let’s get hammered!”). Other times, they get caught up with drinking games or parties that get out of hand.

Teens who chug alcohol and drink as much as they can—as fast as they can—risk dying from alcohol poisoning.



For males, binge drinking means having **≥ 4 DRINKS** within 2 hours.



For females, binge drinking means having **≥ 3 DRINKS** within 2 hours.

# Talk Soon

## Lauren's Story

“Each time Lauren left our house with her dad’s car, he would say to her – ‘Lauren, don’t drink and drive’.

How many parents do that each time their child leaves the house in their family car?

Lauren’s response that night was – ‘Dad, I’m the designated driver tonight.’ – which is really silly because anyone under 21 shouldn’t be considered a designated driver since they aren’t supposed to drink. Young drivers are also inexperienced, so they should never be a designated driver anyways even if they haven’t been drinking.

Additionally, Lauren’s father and I’s conversation should never have been ‘don’t’ drink and drive’; it should have been don’t drink underage because it’s illegal and dangerous”



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*-Debbie Sausville reflecting on the tragic loss of her 16-year-old stepdaughter, who was killed in a single-vehicle, single-occupant crash after drinking underage at an unsupervised party.*

# Signs Your Teen May Be Struggling with Alcohol Use

If your teen is struggling with alcohol use, you may notice alcohol missing from your home, hidden bottles, or an unusual reliance on breath mints or mouthwash to mask the smell. Behavioral changes like mood swings, secretiveness, loss of interest in activities, declining grades, or borrowing money frequently can also be warning signs. If you suspect your teen is struggling, don't ignore the problem—address it with care and urgency.

---

**Parent Tip:** *Balance clear expectations with support. Do: Stay calm, express concern, and guide them toward responsibility. Don't: React with punishment before understanding the situation.*

**Breaking News:** *Dr. Turrisi's most frequently asked question from a parent is, "Can experimenting with drinking alcohol in the teen years result in long-term alcohol problems?"*

*First, studies show that the earlier teens start to drink the heavier they drink when in high school and after high school. Second, the data also show that heavy drinking in high school is associated with higher incidences of blackouts during and after high school. Alcohol blackouts are where individuals are still awake, but their brains are no longer forming memories so they cannot recall parts of the evening the next day. Recent research has shown that blackouts are considered to be accelerants for more and serious problems. Third, the data shows that blackouts in high school are a strong predictor of having an alcohol use disorder at a young age (e.g., 20-21).*

*Symptoms of an alcohol use disorder include:*

- *Drinking more, or longer, than intended*
- *Wanting to cut down or stop drinking but cannot*
- *Spending a lot of time drinking or being sick from drinking*
- *Having to drink more to get an effect*
- *Finding that when the effects of alcohol are wearing off you experience trouble sleeping, shakiness, restlessness, nausea, sweating, a racing heart, or seizures*

*If you notice any of these signs in your teen, consult with your family physician right away.*

# Helping Your Teen Make Good Choices

Many teens choose to drink because they assume everyone else is doing it and that it's an acceptable thing to do. However, studies show that nearly 7 in 10 teens are NOT drinking alcohol.

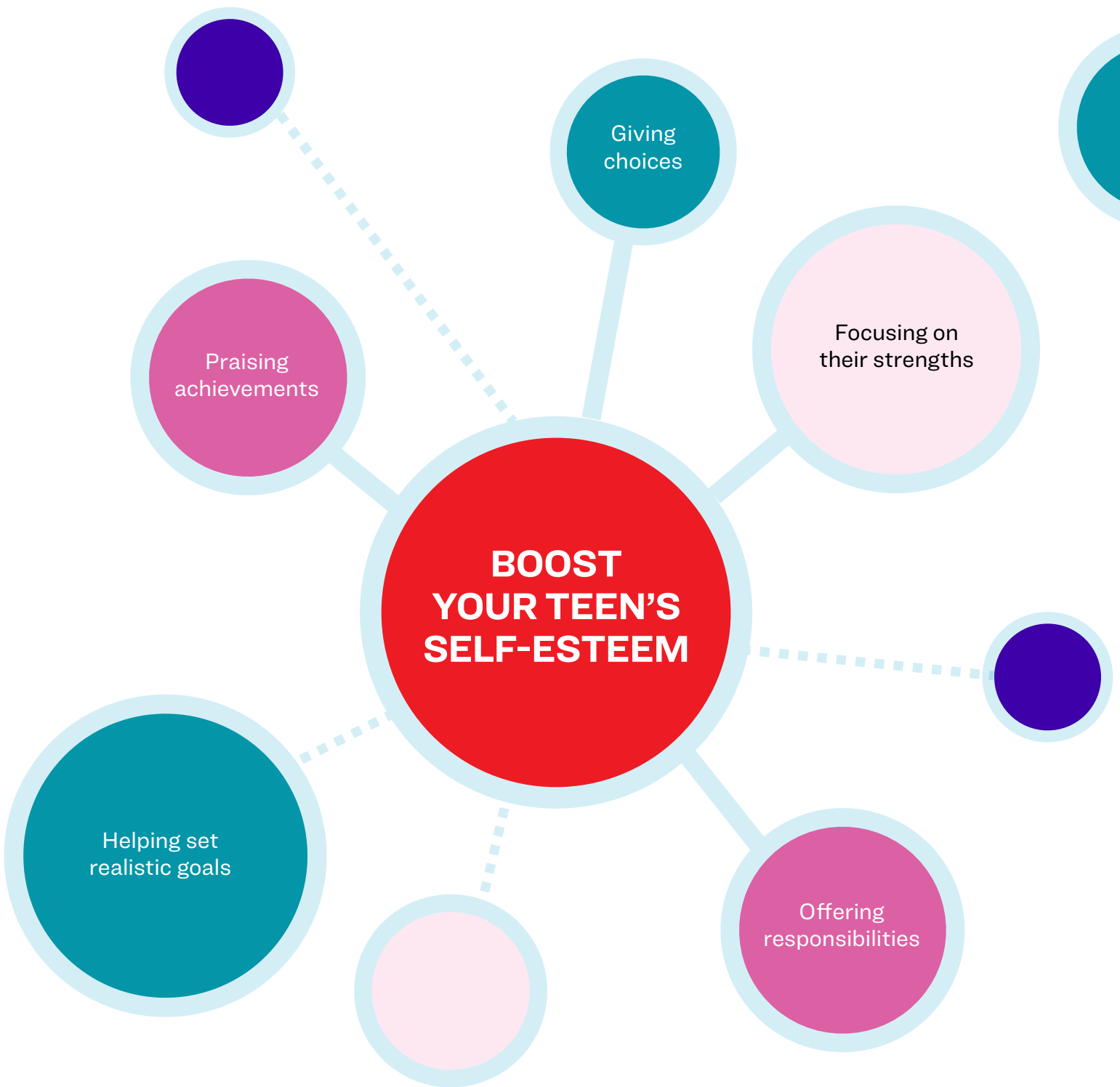
You can't completely protect your child from peer pressure, but by teaching your teen to make good choices and by supervising and monitoring their activities, you can help shield your teen from the most dangerous situations.

## Dealing with Peer Pressure

Sometimes teens face situations where they are pressured to do something they would rather not do. For example, a friend might push your teen to have a drink when they don't want to. You can empower your child by talking to them about ways they can say no without feeling weird or left out. Talk with them about using **ACTIVE and PASSIVE refusal strategies** if they are offered alcohol or other substances.



Your teen might be told:	Refusal Strategy:	Your teen could say:
"Come on, everyone has tried it."	<b>ACTIVE</b> Take a stand	"No, I don't do drugs."
"If you won't drink with us, then why are you hanging out with us?"	<b>PASSIVE</b> Make an excuse	"Sorry, I just have an early game tomorrow morning and need to be ready."
"We drank once before, so what's the problem now?"	<b>ACTIVE</b> Make a statement	"I know, and I'm not making that mistake again."
"Come on, take a drink. It will get you in the mood."	<b>PASSIVE</b> Suggest an alternative	"Actually, I'm in the mood to watch a movie."
"You've been working too hard. Live a little!"	<b>PASSIVE</b> Change the subject	"Thanks! Hey, that reminds me. Did I tell you about..."



Teens who have high self-esteem are better equipped to make smart choices, deal with peer pressure, and avoid underage drinking.

# Good Problem Solving

Helping your teen develop strong problem-solving skills is a critical part in preparing them for the challenges they will face in the future. By coaching your teen through the below theoretical scenario, your teen will be more confident in making healthy, informed decisions when the time comes that they must make decisions on their own.

**Start with a scenario:**

***Your teen is invited to a party where alcohol might be present.***

## Step 1

**Notice the Problem**

What's the situation?

What are the potential risks?



## Step 2

**Identify Possible Actions**

Go to the party...  
what's the plan if  
substances are present?

Skip the party...  
what are alternative  
ways to have fun?



## Step 3

**Gather Information**

What are the  
risks of underage  
drinking?

Would you feel  
confident saying no  
to peer pressure?

How does this  
choice align with your  
long-term goals?



## Step 4

**Examine and Decide**

Which option feels  
best for you?

What factors  
are most important  
in your decision?



## Step 5

**Follow Through**

How will you stick to  
your choice?

What support do you  
need to feel confident  
in your decision?



# Strategies that Help a Teen Succeed

Teens are less likely to drink alcohol when their parents:

## **Empower choices.**

Encourage teens to make their own choices, even relatively minor ones, such as picking a place for the family dinner, choosing a movie to go see, and so on. Sometimes choices can be framed by the parent in ways that the teen is choosing between two desirable alternatives.

## **Give calm guidance.**

Offer clear-headed discussion and guidance about choices teens face that are important to their life path.

## **Respect their concerns, even when maintaining boundaries.**

Respect your teen's urge for independence. However, it is still important to set clear rules against alcohol use and know where your teens are.

## **Phase in freedoms and challenges.**

Gradually reduce parental control so teens have more freedom and responsibility with each passing year.

## CONNECT WITH YOUR KIDS

**Research shows:** the more you connect with your kids, the more protected they are against alcohol and other drug use.

Have dinner together

Enjoy activities together

Talk to each other

Share feelings and concerns

# Choosing Friends

Friendships are very important to teens, and teens typically spend more and more time with friends. Parents need to know who their teens are spending time with and what their teens are doing on a daily basis. You can also encourage your teen to have healthy friendships.

Talk with your teen about the true meaning of friendship.



True friendship is not based on superficial things like money, looks, or popularity.



True friendship is based on mutual respect, caring, understanding, trust, and concern. Real friends want to keep their friends safe and well.

When you discuss the meaning of friendship together, you'll help your teen learn to prioritize making smart decisions about who they allow to influence them.

## Do you worry that your teen is hanging around with the wrong crowd?

Even the smartest kid can choose a friend that leads them down a risky path. It's your job as the parent to empower your teen to choose wisely when making friends. But what do you do when you notice your child hanging out with someone who may not be the best influence?

- **Don't ban a friend.**  
Possibly the worst thing to do is forbid your teen from seeing that friend. If you criticize a friend, your teen will feel compelled to defend them and explain all of the "good" features of the friendship. A better strategy is to include the friend you disapprove of in some family activities. Then you get a chance to get to know them and share your family values.
- **Encourage more friends.**  
Encourage your child to participate in hobbies or extracurriculars where they can meet other teens with appropriate values. Making more friends helps prevent influences by a single "bad" friend.
- **Help teens avoid high-risk group situations.**  
The most dangerous situations for teens are unsupervised group activities and parties. It can be hard to stand up against a group. Teach them strategies to avoid peer pressure or unsafe situations.
- **Monitor social activities and supervise parties.**  
Before your teen attends a social event, contact the host teen's parents to make sure that the party will be supervised by adults and won't involve alcohol or other drugs.

# FINDING ALTERNATIVES TO DRINKING

Some teens have “positive” reasons (from their perspective) for why they might choose to drink. Help teens think of other ways to achieve similar goals.

Rather than celebrating a championship win by drinking with friends...

*Invite some friends over for a celebration party!*

Rather than smoking a joint to blow off steam after studying for the SATs...

*Practice some self-care with a spa night at home.*

Rather than drinking to fit in with new friends...

*Suggest another activity or find friends with similar values.*



# Steering Clear of Driving Dangers

It is illegal for teens to drink alcohol, and it is illegal for teens to drink any amount of alcohol and drive.

An underage drinker might not feel tipsy or drunk and decide it's okay to drive after drinking. However, this is extremely dangerous. Even with small amounts of alcohol, teen drivers are more likely to be in a crash than older drivers after drinking.

Young drivers are at greater risk for crashing than adult drivers, even with low levels of alcohol in the blood.

## 1 in 10 teens



One in 10 teens in high school drinks and drives.

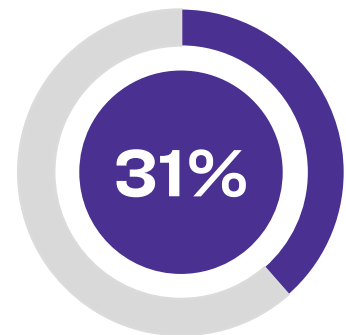
## 1 in 5 teen drivers



One in 5 teen drivers involved in fatal crashes had some alcohol in their system. Most of these drivers (81%) had BACs higher than the legal limit for adults.

## 31% of teen traffic deaths

Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens (15-20 years old), and 31% of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related.



Although impaired driving is ESPECIALLY dangerous for minors, it's important you reiterate to them that NO ONE should EVER drive impaired. There is no "safe" or "skilled" impaired driver, and they should never ride with anyone who has had any amount of a mind-altering substance.

# Discuss the Possible Outcomes of Driving Impaired

## LEGAL & FINANCIAL HARM

- Being charged with purchasing, having, or drinking alcohol underage, or driving under the influence
- Expenses (court fines, lawyer fees, car insurance rate increases)
- Reduced college options, due to admission policies; suspension from sports or clubs
- Alcohol citation may stay on legal record, depending on local regulations
- License could be revoked or possible jail time

## PHYSICAL HARM

- Damage to car or other's car
- Damage to property or other's property
- Personal injury—from minor to life-altering—and/or injuring others
- Death—of you, someone you love or another person on the road

## Riding with an Impaired Driver

*When talking about impaired driving, remember to:*

Discuss the dangers of impaired driving, for drivers AND passengers.

Teach them how to identify signs of impairment.

Encourage alternatives: like calling a trusted adult for a ride.

Remind them there are no shortcuts to sobering up.

Stress that they need to call 911 in an emergency.

**Research shows:** even kids that don't intend to ride with a driver who has been drinking or using substances may be "willing" in some circumstances. For example, they might be willing to get in the car if they feel responsible for helping a friend stay out of trouble or not get hurt. Someday your child may be faced with this decision and it's important to set clear family rules.

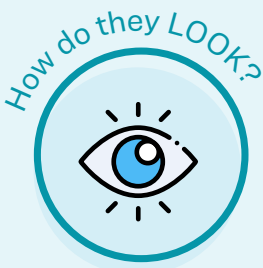
# How do you know if a driver is impaired?

For teens to make the decision not to get into the car with an impaired driver, they first need to know how to identify an impaired driver.

You may have noticed by now that we talk about the dangers of “IMPAIRED” driving, rather than just “drunk” driving. This is because, as cannabis has legalized around the country, instances of drugged driving have skyrocketed. Many people still hold the belief that driving “high” is safe and acceptable. However, substances that are mind-altering greatly impact your brain’s ability to function normally. Driving is a complex task that involves a wide range of cognitive skills, multisensory perception, and motor abilities. This is why it’s dangerous, and often deadly, for ANYONE of ANY age to drive impaired.

So how can someone tell if their driver is impaired?  
Teach your teen to be observant of the driver BEFORE they get into the car.

**Using their sense of sight, smell, and hearing, teens should ask themselves:**



- Glossy eyes;  
Bloodshot eyes;  
Dilated pupils;  
Can't keep eyes open
- Stumbling,  
can't walk straight
- Agitated energy;  
Sweaty and alert,  
jittery
- Moving slowly,  
lethargic or drowsy



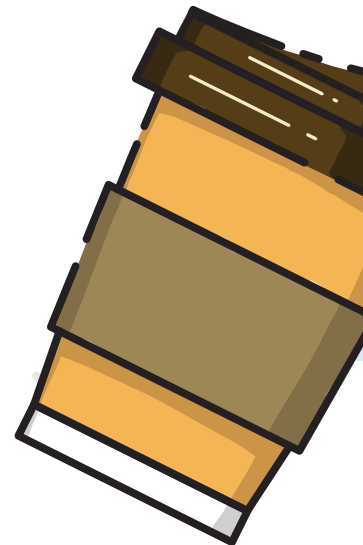
- Slurring  
their words
- Talking slowly,  
mumbling
- Talking quickly,  
rushing their  
words
- Talking louder  
than usual



- Strong, sharp  
smell - like  
alcohol
- Stinky, skunk  
smell - like  
cannabis
- Bad breath

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**Parent Tip:** *Remind your teen that asking the driver if they are okay to drive does not mean they are. Any amount of a mind-altering substance is impairing. If they are acting differently, they will drive differently. It's never worth rolling the dice.*

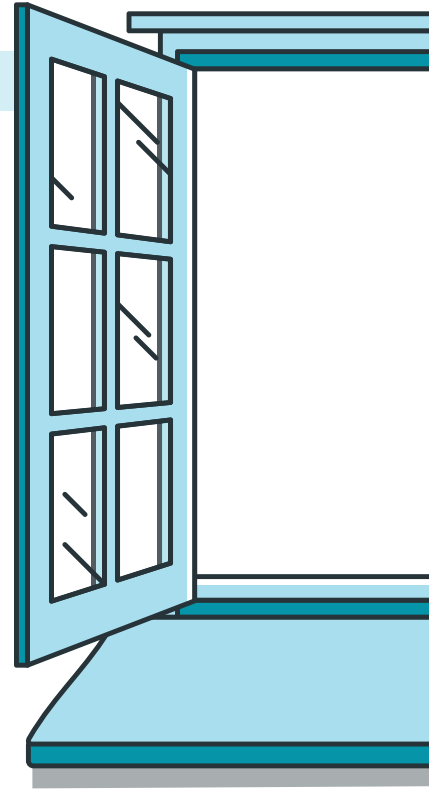


## YOU CAN'T GET SOBER FASTER BY...



Exercising

Getting fresh air



# The Myth of “Sobering Up”

After you drink, the liver removes alcohol from your body and bloodstream. This process takes time and cannot be sped up. As a result, there is no proven way to make a person sober quicker.

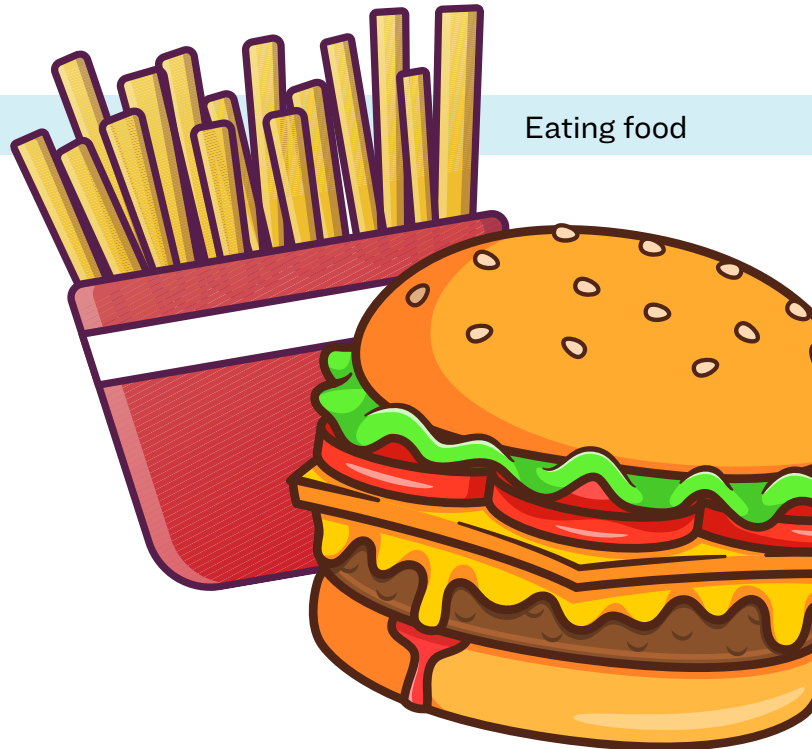
Drinking coffee



Taking a cold shower



Eating food



## Wrong Message?

Some parents worry that offering a ride home could send the wrong message and make teens believe it's okay to drink alcohol. Even if you offer a ride home, you can still enforce previously established consequences for breaking the no-alcohol rule.

Assure your teen that their safety is the #1 priority. When teens have good communication with their parents and trust that their parents won't overreact (by getting angry and setting harsh or unknown punishments), teens are more likely to call home for help.

When your teen calls you to pick them up because either they or someone else has been drinking:

- Pick up your teen and get them home safely. Be calm and not angry on the way home.
- If the established household rule has been broken, pick the soonest appropriate time to discuss consequences with your teen. It may be best to wait until the next day.
- Talk again about the rules and consequences. Remind them, you only want to keep them safe.

## Tips for Keeping Teens Safe on the Road

MADD recommends that parents make clear rules about driving to help keep their teens safe. Parents should become familiar with the provisions of graduated drivers licensing (GDL) and zero tolerance laws in their state and firmly enforce those rules. GDL laws prevent about one in five crashes for teen drivers.

Take the following steps to help keep teens safe:

- **Have specific driving rules**  
Follow all posted road laws, limit the number of passengers, and absolutely no cell phone use while driving.
- **Set no-alcohol use rules**  
along with curfews and limited nighttime and weekend driving.
- **Discuss with your teen**  
the dangers of riding with anyone who has had any amount of alcohol or cannabis. Make a plan with your teen in case they find themselves in an unsafe situation.

### REMEMBER

Your teen is looking to you to be an example!

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One of the best ways to enforce these safety skills is to model it yourself.

# Talking About Cannabis and Medications

Next to alcohol, cannabis is the most misused drug among youth. According to published studies:

## By age 20

By the age of 20, approximately 50% of youth have used cannabis in their lifetime. This is 2-3 times more than either younger individuals or older individuals.

## 1 in 3 youth

Data shows that 1 in 3 youth who drink alcohol have also combined alcohol with cannabis on the same evenings. On these occasions, they tend to experience 2-3 times more problems compared to those evenings when they consume only alcohol.

## Vaping

Data show that the initiation of e-cigarette use results in higher initiation of cannabis use.

## Poly-use

Further, students that used both e-cigarette and cannabis report higher rates of experiencing violence, unintentional injury, risky sexual decisions, and other substance use compared to students who did not use e-cigarette or cannabis.

## Odds of use

Odds of cannabis use by teens are statistically significantly higher when they reported their parent, sibling or best friend use cannabis.



## How Cannabis Works in the Body

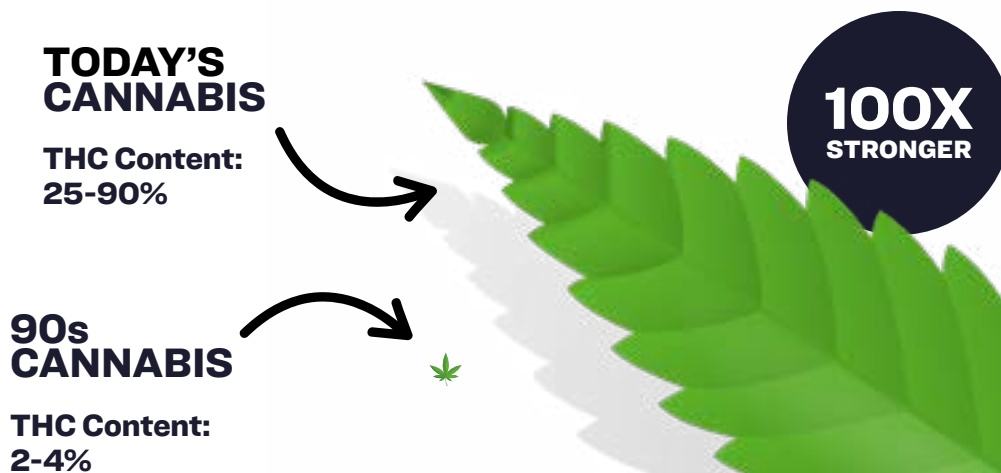
Cannabis contains a chemical called tetrahydrocannabinol, commonly known as THC. When THC enters the brain by smoking, vaping, or eating edibles (e.g., gummies or brownies), it influences chemical reactions that create positive feelings or a “high.” While this is happening, cannabis is also altering normal communication inside the brain and between the brain and the rest of the body. These alterations can seriously affect movement and coordination, sensation, pain, emotions, judgment, decision-making, memory, and appetite.

# Cannabis Yesterday and Today

Prior to 1990, the THC content in cannabis was around 2-4%. In 2023, in states where there are stores that legally sell cannabis to the public, the THC content ranges from 25-90%. This means that the THC content between cannabis used in 1990, and today can be over 100 times stronger.

Think of it this way—if the strength of alcohol in beer increased in the same manner, having one beer today would be equal to having over 20 beers in 1990! Because of strong regulation, however, beer potency has changed very little over time, so a beer today raises the same effects as a beer did back then.

Today's cannabis is not the same drug as what many parents around the age of 40 might have experienced when they were young. The magnified strength in today's cannabis results in magnified effects.



This is why health professionals are reporting cannabis use resulting in increased rates of:

- Increased heart rates
- Bronchitis
- Cancer
- Anxiety and depression
- Sleep and fatigue
- Changes in brain function, leading to mental illness (specifically schizophrenia)
- Addiction. Yes, today's cannabis is highly addictive!

*Last, but not least, studies have shown that the effects of cannabis on brain function cannot be reversed.*

# Cannabis and Youth

Young people's brains continue to develop until their mid-20s. As a result, cannabis affects them differently than adults. As you read on page 10, research has shown teens who use cannabis are more likely to report decreases in brain volume, poorer attention, verbal skills, and self-regulatory behaviors.

**According to research, here are some of the reasons teens have told us why they use cannabis:**

## WHY THEY USE

- To get more of a high or “drunk” feeling (“cross-faded”)
- To relax or reduce stress; it feels good
- To counteract the side effects of drinking alcohol (e.g., reduce spinning, vomiting, headache)
- Coping strategy (e.g., trouble in personal life)
- Social anxiety or peer pressure

**Not all teens use cannabis, and here are some reasons they told us they don't:**

## WHY THEY DON'T

- To avoid greening out (where they get so high they pass out) or losing control
- Feeling sick (e.g., nausea, vomiting), anxious, or paranoid
- It makes their heart race
- They have responsibilities and it may lead to poor decisions
- It makes them feel tired the next morning
- It makes it difficult to do well in school
- Cannabis is illegal in ALL states for individuals under 21

## Common Myths Youth Believe About Cannabis

# Know The Real Facts.

### ○ MYTH

*Cannabis is safe and not addictive.*

### ● The Facts

Cannabis is currently the leading cause of addiction and dependence other than alcohol in the U.S. Studies show that cannabis accounts for over 50% of the 7 million people aged 12 or older dependent on or abusing a drug. Cannabis is much stronger today than in the past. There is no way to determine a safe dosage (e.g., some vaping, a few bites of a brownie). There are also many different strains with different effects. This makes cannabis a higher risk drug to use.

### ○ MYTH

*Cannabis is safer than alcohol.*

### ● The Facts

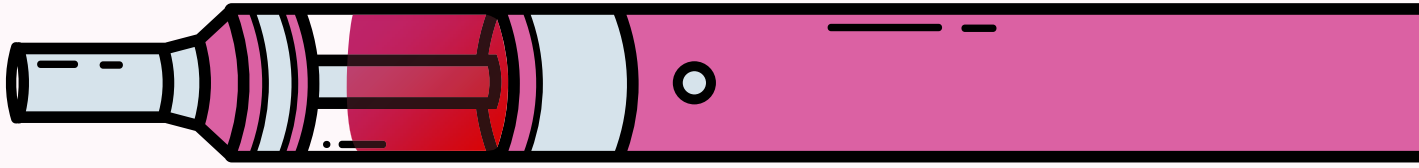
Both alcohol and cannabis are associated with significant problems. Comparing which is safer overlooks that there are serious risks associated with both drugs.

### ○ MYTH

*Cannabis is a widely accepted medical treatment and is therefore safe to use.*

### ● The Facts

While medicinal cannabis is legal in some states, it is only approved for specific conditions and requires certification from a qualified healthcare provider. Patients need prescriptions that specify how much, how often, and in what form it can be used. Medicinal cannabis is rarely prescribed to children. In these instances, the benefits of medicinal cannabis MUST outweigh the potential for damage to the developing brain.

**MYTH**

*Cannabis makes you a better driver.*

**The Facts**

Studies have shown that, of seriously injured drivers admitted to trauma centers, more than 1 out of 4 tested positive for cannabis. In another study of fatally injured drivers in a western state, over 1 in 10 tested positive for cannabis.

**MYTH**

*All cannabis is legal.*

**The Facts**

While some states have legalized cannabis for medicinal and recreational use, it remains illegal at the federal level and is classified as a Schedule I drug. Federal law still prohibits its possession, sale, and use, regardless of state laws. No state allows recreational cannabis use for individuals under 21.

**MYTH**

*Cannabis helps you sleep.*

**The Facts**

Teens who use cannabis report more trouble sleeping and staying asleep compared to their peers who do not use cannabis.

# How You Can Help Your Teen

A common question we hear from parents is, “What can I do to help reduce the risks of my child getting hurt from substance use?” **Consider the following case study:**

Teri has a son who is a senior considering attending an out-of-state university. Teri has talked to her son about drinking alcohol (and using cannabis) since he was in middle school and continues to “check in” fairly regularly.

Teri and her husband, Chris, are typical parents. They prefer spending time with close friends and family on weekends while having dinner and drinks, but nothing ever out of hand and no cannabis use. In his senior year, they allow their son to have a small glass of wine or a beer on very special occasions. Otherwise, drinking is not allowed or encouraged. Teri has heard about the heavy drinking that goes on at parties and is concerned, like many parents, but feels that by keeping lines of communication open and talking to her son about the risks, she is doing all that she can. To the best of her knowledge, he avoids parties on weekends, but she knows there have been at least one or two occasions where he was out with friends where there was alcohol and cannabis.

	What Parents Did Well	Impact on Child	Research Shows
Protective Factors	They talk regularly with Jeremy about alcohol and cannabis.	Jeremy is informed about these substances and understands his parents’ position.	The more parents talk with their children about alcohol and cannabis, the less likely they are to use them in combination.
	They model low, responsible alcohol use and no cannabis use.	Jeremy sees his parents’ responsible choices and embodies that in his own decision-making.	Parental modeling is strongly associated with children’s alcohol and cannabis use.
	They continue to check-in and communicate openly with Jeremy.	Jeremy has many opportunities to ask questions and learn more, even as he grows up and enters college.	The higher the quality of parent communication, the less likely their college-age children are to use alcohol and cannabis in combination.

	What Parents Could Change	Impact on Child	Research Shows
Risk Factors	They allow Jeremy to have a small glass of wine or beer on special occasions.	Jeremy is more inclined to drink more often and in larger amounts when not around his parents. He believes that celebrations require alcohol.	Studies show that allowing alcohol on special occasions is associated with increased frequency and amount of drinking.
	They do not uphold the 21 minimum age drinking law.	Jeremy does not see the 21 minimum drinking age law as legitimate or important to follow and is more likely to drink alcohol and use cannabis.	Using alcohol before the age of 21 is a known risk factor for negative consequences from alcohol and cannabis use.

## Key Takeaways

### Delay Alcohol Use:

Until after age 21 is crucial in reducing long-term risks, including combining substances. Allowing alcohol, on special occasions especially, can send the message that celebrations require alcohol.

### Communication is Key:

Talking with your teen consistently reduces the risk of substance misuse, even in high-pressure situations like parties.

### Model Healthy, Responsible Behaviors:

Parents who drink less and avoid cannabis offer protective modeling that their teens are likely to follow.

## Did You Use Cannabis When You Were Young?

Like alcohol, parents differ in their experiences with cannabis when they were young. There are many different ways parents approach answering this question. Here are some examples of how to respond to this type of question:

“If I knew what I know now, I would have made a lot of decisions differently, including not trying something at a party when I was younger that I might later regret.”

“I know the data also shows that when parents think it is okay for their teens to drink or smoke once in a while, those teens drink/smoke more and have more problems in their lives.”

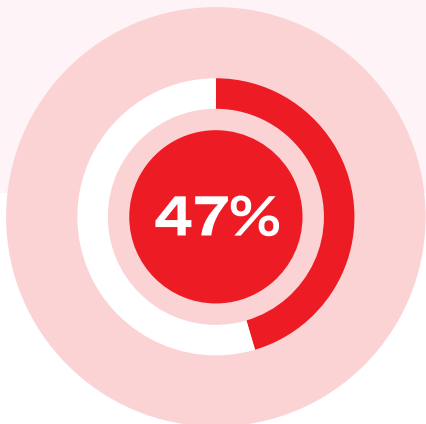
“I do know now studies show the younger people are when they drink or smoke cannabis, the more likely they will have more frequent and more severe problems in their teens, 20s, and beyond.”

“There’s a lot more research about the harmful affects of cannabis now compared to back when I was young. With the information we have now, it would be irresponsible to not encourage you to make an informed decision. I want to protect you as best I can. So let’s talk about it.”

# Medications

Out of concern for alcohol and other substances, you might overlook talking with your child about over-the-counter (OTC) medications and prescription drugs. However, there are many mind-altering drugs commonly kept in your medicine cabinet that can be accessible and enticing to teens.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that :



**Almost half of teens (47%)**

Say it is easy to get prescription drugs from a parent's medicine cabinet.

**Nearly 1 in 4 teens (23%)**

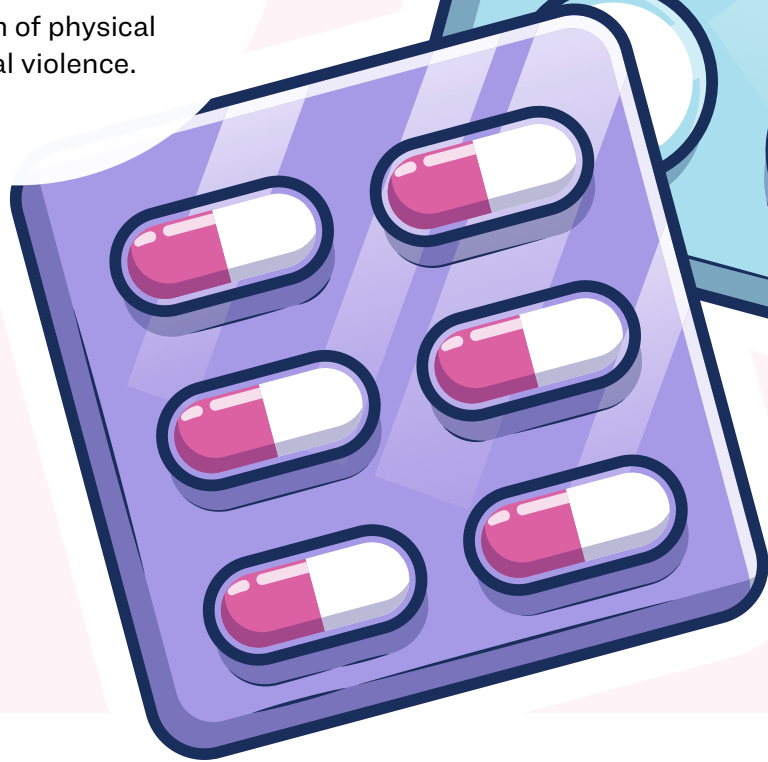
Report taking a prescription drug not prescribed to them by a doctor at least once in their lives.



Prescription drugs, when used properly under a doctor's supervision, are generally safe. However, they can pose a threat when taken at the wrong times, when not taken according to the correct dosage, and if taken by someone else. It can lead to abuse, addiction (for example, abusing prescription opioid pain relievers, like OxyContin and Vicodin, may lead to heroin use ), and even death. Even OTC medications, like cough syrup and allergy medicines, are mind-altering and are therefore commonly abused. It is important to teach youth that medications taken properly come with benefits and may still have risks; but if taken improperly, can be dangerous.



*Students who report* ever using prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription are more likely than other students to have been the victim of physical or sexual violence.



Kids might try to abuse medications or prescription drugs for a variety of reasons:

- To get high
- To feel better
- To help concentrate or stay alert
- To lose weight
- To perform better in sports
- To entertain themselves or try a daring behavior

There is no “good” reason for abusing medications. Your teen needs to understand that abusing medications is not only incredibly dangerous, but it's **ILLEGAL**.

## “HIGH” TEST SCORES

Some teens use Adderall or Ritalin to try and boost their test performance to improve their grades. Studies show that these stimulants do not help learning when used by persons who do not have ADHD.

# Behind the Wheel

Not only is medication misuse dangerous for a developing brain and body, but it is also responsible for impaired driving crashes and fatalities, too. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 64% of seriously and fatally injured drivers tested at five major trauma centers in 2020 had at least one impairing substance in their system, including opioids, cannabis, alcohol, stimulants, and anti-depressants.

Certain drug effects, such as drowsiness, dizziness, and impaired thinking can lead to vehicle crashes. This is why **no one should EVER drive if they have taken any amount of a mind-altering substance, even if it's a prescribed medication.** Help your teens plan an exit strategy so they NEVER take a ride from someone who they suspect is impaired by alcohol or other drugs.

*As a parent, you can help keep your child safe from substance abuse by:*

## **Securely storing medications.**

Knowing what is in your medicine cabinet, keeping medications in a locked, safe place, and properly disposing of them when you're done using them.

## **Talking early, openly, and often.**

Include OTC medications and prescription drugs in your conversations with your teen and keep the lines of communication open.

## **Monitoring their activities.**

Monitor their use of the internet for illegal online purchases, their social media pages, and any credit card purchases.

## **Teaching them how to identify signs of impairment.**

Knowing how to spot signs of drug impairment, which often looks different than alcohol impairment, is a lifesaving skill.

## **Verbally sharing disapproval of medication abuse.**

Kids may think taking prescription drugs are safer than other drugs because they are given by pharmacists or because you have them at home; it is important that they hear from you the risks associated and your disapproval of it.

## **Recognizing signs of abuse:**

- Fatigue or insomnia
- Sudden mood changes including irritability, secretiveness, or personality shifts such as lack of interest in a favorite hobby.
- Red or glazed eyes, and repeated health complaints.
- Decreased or obsessive interest in schoolwork.
- Missing prescription medicines from your medicine cabinet or additional filled prescriptions that you did not order.

# Take Action


## Key Takeaways




*Before talking to your teen, remember these key points:*

- **Reiterate the law:** Remind your teen that alcohol is illegal for those under 21.
- **Highlight the truth:** Most of their peers aren't drinking—so they're not alone in making healthy choices.
- **Explain the risks:** Alcohol and cannabis harm young brains, affecting judgment and decision-making.
- **Be clear on your rules:** Talk about your family's stance on alcohol and cannabis and agree on consequences.
- **Discuss motivations:** Talk about what might drive kids to drink alcohol or try other substances and share alternatives instead.
- **Brainstorm peer pressure solutions:** Help your teen come up with ways to handle situations where alcohol, cannabis, or other substances are involved.

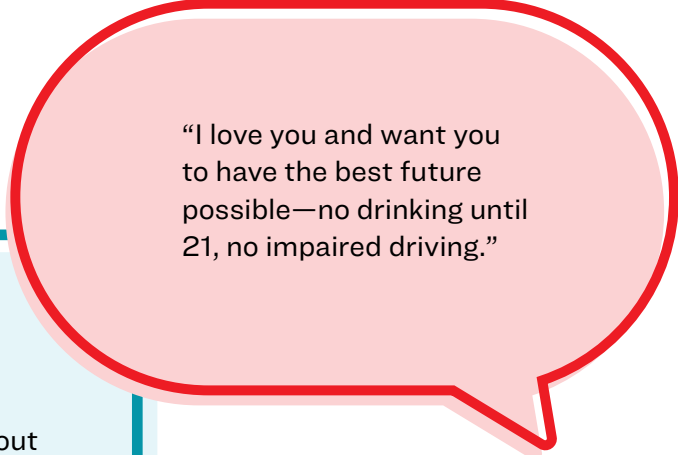
### REMIND THEM:



“You matter, and we need to talk about how risky alcohol and cannabis are for young people.”



“I care about you and your safety. That's why I need to know where you are.”



“I love you and want you to have the best future possible—no drinking until 21, no impaired driving.”

# Promoting a Safer Community

Even one parent can influence policy makers and enforcement agencies and help assure a safe and healthy environment. MADD urges you to get involved by taking the steps below.

# 1

## SUPPORT STRONG LAWS

Tell lawmakers that you support the 21 minimum drinking age and want to cut off kids' ability to obtain alcohol. Encourage programs that:

- Require registration and tracking of beer kegs.
- Support social host laws that hold adults accountable when they host underage drinking parties.
- Limit new or renewed liquor licenses in your community.

# 2

## PUSH FOR STRONG ENFORCEMENT

Ask police officials and judges to actively enforce “zero tolerance” laws and programs that fight underage drinking. For example:

- After an underage drinker has a traffic crash, urge officials to find out how they got the alcohol and hold those businesses or adults accountable.
- Identify and penalize retailers that illegally sell alcohol to youth.

# 3

## INVOLVE EDUCATORS

- Contact schools in your area and ask what they're doing to prevent underage alcohol and other substance use. Suggest school assemblies and activities focused on underage substance use prevention at key points throughout the year, such as prom, homecoming, Red Ribbon Week, and spring break.

# 4

## HOLD ADVERTISERS ACCOUNTABLE

- When you see alcohol or cannabis marketing that targets young people, complain in the comment section and report the post, asking to have that advertising removed.

## Protect Your Teen. Support Lifesaving Change.

**The mission of Mothers Against Drunk Driving® is to end drunk and drugged driving, support the victims of these violent crimes and prevent underage drinking and other drug use.**

As parents, we do everything we can to keep our teens safe—but right now, drunk driving remains the deadliest threat on our roads. That's why MADD is leading the charge with the **HALT Anti-Drunk Driving Law**—a groundbreaking law that requires advanced technology in all new cars that will detect and stop drunk drivers. The next generation of vehicles can stop drunk drivers before they ever put your teen at risk.



Join MADD in the fight to end drunk driving for good. Learn more about the HALT Anti-Drunk Driving Law and how you can help drive change to protect your teen's future.

***Take action today. Visit [madd.org/halt](https://madd.org/halt)***

## Final Remarks

Parents often wonder if their children are truly listening during crucial conversations, but the research is clear:

**PARENTS  
DO MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE**

The way you act, the boundaries you set, and the questions you ask all help to share your child's choices.

Studies show that asking children open-ended questions that start with how, what, and why encourages critical thinking and problem solving. This is the best way to open the lines of communication and improve the impact of these lifesaving conversations. It is never too late to start making a difference in your child's decisions around alcohol, cannabis, and other substances.

For additional tools to support you and your family, visit [madd.org/powerofparents](https://madd.org/powerofparents)

**National Presenting  
Sponsor**



**National Contributing  
Partner**



**National Supporting Partner**



Preventing underage drinking requires a shared commitment, and MADD is grateful for General Motors' partnership with the *Power of Parents* program. With their support, we are equipping more families with the resources they need to have open and honest conversations about alcohol and other drugs and their risks.

**MADD** IMPAIRED DRIVING  
ENDS HERE.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving® (MADD) is a national nonprofit leading the movement to end impaired driving for good. Since 1980, MADD has helped reduce drunk driving deaths in America by more than 40%, saved nearly 500,000 lives, and served nearly one million victims and survivors. The organization is committed to leading prevention efforts with young adults, collaborating with law enforcement to keep our roads safe from impaired

drivers, as well as advocating for stricter sentencing and stronger laws, including the HALT Drunk Driving Law that mandates anti-drunk driving technology in every new car. MADD continues to provide support services to victims and survivors of impaired driving at no charge through victim advocates and the 24-Hour Victim Help Line **1-877-MADD-HELP**. For more information or to donate, visit [madd.org](http://madd.org) and follow MADD on social media.

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[madd.org/powerofparents](http://madd.org/powerofparents) | **877.ASK.MADD**

511 E. John Carpenter Freeway Suite 200 Irving, TX 75062

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