

A Refresher on Youth Alcohol Use

Continually, we hear in the news about vaping, marijuana use, prescription medications (such as Fentanyl), and the dangers they present to our youth. While these are pressing issues that need to be discussed, it's important to remember some of the less covered substance-use issues. For instance, alcohol remains the highest used and most abused substance amongst our youth. According to the Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey (NRPFS) report:

- Both nationally and in Nebraska, more youth report using alcohol than any other substance, including vaping products, marijuana, and non-prescribed prescription medication.
- Nebraska's youth reported that by 12th grade, almost 60% of them have tried alcohol, and 32% have of them have consumed alcohol within the last month.
- Nebraska's youth alcohol use is higher than the average youth alcohol use across the nation.

It's true that there is a wide, varied road that leads to alcohol use in adolescents, and that there is no easy remedy or cure-all to fix the issue. However, it's important to remember that parents and role models play a leading role in preventing the use of alcohol among youth. In fact, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 80% of teens say their parents are the biggest influence in their decision to drink. A vital first step in prevention is having an open conversation about alcohol use. Experts say that these conversations should begin early, and happen often. It's recommended that you discuss the subject as early as the age of nine, to ensure that your child is informed before social media or peers can misdirect them. Additionally, it's important to continue discussing the topic as they mature. These open conversations will build trust with your adolescent, and allows opportunities for them to ask questions and learn more from a reliable source.

Given the time of the year, with proms and graduations just around the bend, it's an extremely important time to make sure you've spoken with your child about alcohol use. While these conversations can be awkward, it's a small step that can help them avoid terrible situations and accidents. When discussing alcohol with your kids, prevention experts recommend the following tips:

- Stay informed about underage drinking, as well as the risks associated with youth alcohol use.
- Rely on information from credible sources. For example, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA or NIDA teen), the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and the Partnership to End Addiction are all excellent resources to trust.
- Talk honestly about the dangers of underage drinking and establish clear rules about not drinking while under age.
- Emphasize the legal consequences of MIP's and MIC's and their impact on a child's future.
- Set expectations about what your child should do if offered alcohol. For example, "If you're feeling pressured to drink, text me and I'll pick you up."
- Talk about choices and consequences to help them take responsibility for their decisions.
- Teach and encourage healthy coping skills to deal with issues like school, social, or family stress, as well as peer pressure.

For further information on Youth Alcohol use, please follow the links below for a few more helpful resources.

Talk Heart 2 Heart

<https://talkheart2heart.org/>

SAMHSA: "Talk. They Hear You." Substance Use Prevention Campaign Resources

<https://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources>

MADD: "Power of Parents" Handbooks

<https://www.madd.org/the-solution/power-of-parents/#resources>