

Short, frequent discussions can have a real impact on your child's decisions about alcohol.

Talking to your child at an early age about drinking is the first step toward keeping them alcohol-free. But as they enter junior high and high school, the pressure to try alcohol increases. It's important to continue the conversation throughout adolescence.

Talking often builds an open, trusting relationship with your child.

Children are more likely to avoid drinking when they have a strong, trusting relationship with their parents. Get into the habit of chatting with your child every day. It will make it easier to have serious conversations about things like alcohol, and will make your child more comfortable coming to you for advice.

Lots of little talks are more effective than one "big talk."

Sitting down for the "big talk" about alcohol can be intimidating for both you and your child. Try using everyday opportunities to talk – in the car, during dinner, or while you and your child are watching TV. Having lots of little talks takes the pressure off trying to get all of the information out in one lengthy discussion, and your child will be less likely to tune you out.

When you do talk about alcohol, make your views and rules clear.

Take the time to discuss your beliefs and opinions about alcohol with your child. Be honest and express a clear, consistent message that underage drinking is unacceptable. When they feel that you're being real and honest with them, they'll be more likely to respect your rules about underage drinking.

As children get older, the conversation changes.

What you say to a 9-year-old about alcohol is different from what you say to a 15-year-old. Children also can't learn all they need to know from a single discussion.

Make sure that the information you offer your child fits their age. As they get older, you can give them more information and reinforce your rules.

Remember that the conversation goes both ways.

Although talking to your child about your thoughts about alcohol is essential, it's also important to hear their point of view. Give your child the opportunity to ask you questions, and listen to what they have to say. Children who have parents who listen to their feelings and concerns are more likely to say "no" to alcohol.

What you do is just as important as what you say.

In addition to talking often with your child about alcohol, it's important to set a good example. If you choose to drink, you can positively influence your child by drinking in moderation and NEVER driving when you've been drinking. Be aware of where you keep your alcohol, and always remind your child that the alcohol in your house is off-limits.