

Talking to your child about alcohol and drugs



Let's talk

The best way to protect your children from alcohol and drugs is to talk to them about it.

You might find it difficult to believe, but you are one of the most important influences on what your children think and do.

Why let drink decide?

Alcohol may not seem like a concern for your family. But it can leave your children vulnerable.

The facts speak for themselves:

- Young people who drink regularly are twice as likely to miss school, get poor grades and get a criminal record.
- Over two thousand children under 16 are admitted to hospital every year because of drinking.
- Alcohol can also lead young people to make bad decisions. At age 15, almost one in eight teenage girls has had unprotected sex after drinking.

Guidance from the Chief Medical Officer advises that children aged under 15 should never drink alcohol, even in small quantities. It is healthiest for your children not to drink alcohol until they are 18 years old.

If 15 to 17 year olds do consume alcohol, they should only do so now and again and certainly no more than once a week. They should never exceed recommended adult daily limits (2-3 units for females, 3-4 units for males) and should always be supervised by a parent or carer.

Top tips on talking to your children about alcohol

- **Don't wait**

Children are aware of alcohol from an earlier age than you might think. So don't be tempted to think that your own child is too young to know about alcohol. You should certainly be talking about it by the time your child makes the move to secondary school.

- **Be honest**

Be prepared to talk openly about your own attitude to alcohol, how much you drink and why you drink. Your child is bound to want to talk about this.

- **Look for openers**

The effects of alcohol often pop up in news stories, films and soaps. These all offer opportunities for talking about alcohol in your home. Or why not broach the topic in an everyday situation such as giving your child a lift in the car?

- **Don't forget to listen**

Try asking your child what they understand about alcohol rather than telling them what you know. Get a conversation going. If there are questions you don't know the answers to, look them up together with your child.

- **Keep talking**

Your child has to cope with many issues as they grow up. Try to get in the habit of talking with your child about all of them – including alcohol.

- **Pick your moment**

If your child has drunk alcohol, pick your moment to talk to them about it. It's not a good idea to talk to your child about alcohol when they're drunk or have a hangover. Wait until they are in a receptive mood.

- **Set boundaries**

Similarly, if your child is drinking alcohol, set some clear limits to the use of alcohol by your child and let them know why you are doing it. Explain what, when and how much you think it is appropriate for them to drink. Involve them in a discussion so they know you've taken their views into account. Then stick consistently to the rules you've set.

One key thing to remember to say...

Make sure that your child knows that your number one concern is for their safety. You should always follow through on the consequences if they break your rules around alcohol use. But let them know that consequences always take second place to their safety. That way they will be more ready to talk to you if there's a problem.

One key thing to remember to do...

Look at your own alcohol use and ensure it's sending out the right messages to your child. Young people learn as much from seeing what their parents do as from listening to what they say. It is helpful to set an example to your child by creating some boundaries around your own use of alcohol.

Alcohol and Pregnancy

If you are pregnant, or trying for a baby the healthiest option is not to drink at all. The risk of harm to your baby and miscarriage are highest during the first three months of pregnancy, when you should avoid drinking alcohol altogether.

There is uncertainty about how much alcohol is safe to drink in pregnancy but if you do drink during the latter stages of your pregnancy, you should avoid drinking more than 1 to 2 units of alcohol once or twice a week.

What about illegal drugs and other substances?

Although many people believe otherwise, levels of drug use among young people has gone down in recent years – to be exact, the amount of 11-15 year olds who had taken an illegal drug in the last year has fallen from 20% in 2001 to 12% in 2011.

Cannabis is the most commonly used illegal drug. The number of young people under 15 who take Class A drugs like cocaine and heroin is extremely small.

The truth is that you probably can't prevent your child from coming into contact with drugs. But your influence can mean they make the right choice if they do – by making sure you know just as much as they do about drugs and talking openly about the risks.

The tips for talking about alcohol are just as relevant for talking to your children about illegal drugs. However, you may need to know a bit more about the relative levels of harm of different drugs.

It is recommended that parents visit talktofrank.com and read the leaflet '*Drugs: Does Your Child Know More Than You?*'

Remember, if you combine alcohol with any substance that causes a 'high', you increase the health risk.

Staying SAFE

If your child is going out for the night, ask them to do some simple things to reduce the risk of falling into harm's way:

Say where they are going

- Your child should let you, as well as their friends, know where they are going, and when they are coming home.

Agree how they are getting home

- Ask your child to plan their night before they go out and keep money aside so they can get home.
- Make sure they have a phone number for a trusted taxi company.
- Tell them never to get into a car if you know the driver has been drinking.

Find help

- Advise them to avoid aggressive people and walk away from someone who wants a fight. Young people should not be shy of talking to a police officer if they feel threatened.
- If your child becomes worried that one of their friends has had too much to drink, encourage them to find a responsible adult or call an ambulance.

Everyone counts

- Encourage them to keep close to at least one friend and never leave one of their friends out alone.

If you are concerned about a young person's alcohol or drug use please call Compass Warwickshire on freephone 08000 887248.

For more information please visit:

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/alcohol

www.talktofrank.com

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis

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If you are looking for any further information or advice for your family, the Family Information Service can help you. We offer a free and impartial information and signposting service for parents and carers of children and young people aged 0-20 on a range of topics such as; childcare, benefits, health, leisure, disability support and much more.

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Tel: 0845 090 8044 or 01926 742274

Email: fis@warwickshire.gov.uk

Web: www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis



Warwickshire Family Information Service

