



Keeping kids away from alcohol

Recent studies from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism show that children are beginning to drink at very young ages, sometimes before they finish elementary school. Because the age at which a person first uses alcohol is a powerful predictor of lifetime alcohol abuse and dependence, it's important to talk to your child early about the dangers of alcohol. It's also crucial to help your child deal with the social pressures to drink.

Although some parents think alcohol is a part of growing up and that it's harmless, it's not. When used by children, alcohol poses very serious health risks for bodies and minds that are still maturing. It can cloud judgment and interfere with developing social skills and academic achievement. Children have more exposure and pressure than ever before to drink. Some telling statistics:

- **Kids are pressured to drink.** Thirty percent of fourth through sixth graders said they got “a lot” of pressure from their classmates to drink beer.
- **Kids are drinking regularly.** About 41 percent of ninth graders say they have drunk alcohol in the past month — more than those who say they have smoked cigarettes.
- **Kids drink to get drunk.** More than one-fifth of eighth graders and 44 percent of tenth graders have been drunk at least once. Almost one-fourth of ninth graders report binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks in a row) in the past month.

Parents do have the power to help their children stay away from alcohol. Children whose parents are involved in their lives — knowing where the child is, attending after-school events, listening to their problems — are less likely to drink alcohol. Parents can help prevent underage drinking and provide a safer environment for their children. Here are some tips:

- Maintain open communication with your child. Avoid being critical when your child comes to you with concerns.
- Help your child develop strategies on how to say “no” when offered alcohol. Practice how your child will respond in these situations.



- Always have adult supervision when children are visiting your home. Do not allow parties or gatherings in your home when you are not present.
- Ask questions and confirm arrangements about parties or gatherings your child plans to attend.
- If you have alcohol in your home, store it in a secure place. As an adult, drink responsibly.
- Never allow your child to drink alcohol, even on special occasions. It will only send a mixed message.

Brought to you by Healthy Blue Living. Healthy Blue Living members who have questions about their health, specific conditions or other health concerns, can call BlueHealthConnection[®] at 800-637-2972.