

UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

ANSWERING YOUR CHILD'S TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT ALCOHOL

As your child becomes curious about alcohol, he or she may turn to you for answers and advice. Use this opportunity to start an open, honest conversation about drinking. Because some questions can be difficult to answer, it is important to be prepared. The following are some common questions and answers about underage drinking.

“I got invited to a party. Can I go?”

Ask your child if an adult will be present at the party or if he or she thinks children will be drinking. Remind your child that even being at a party where there is underage drinking can get him or her into trouble. Use this time to establish or reinforce your rules about alcohol and outline the behavior you expect.

“Did you drink when you were a kid?”

Don't let your past stop you from talking to your child about underage drinking. If you drank as a teenager, be honest. Acknowledge that it was risky. Make sure to emphasize that we now know even more about the risks to children who drink underage. You could even give your child an example of a painful moment that occurred because of your underage drinking.

“Why do you drink?”

Make a distinction between alcohol use among children and among adults. Explain to your child your reasons for drinking: whether it is to enhance a meal, share good times with friends, or celebrate a special occasion. Point out that if you choose to drink, it is always in moderation. Tell your child that some people should not drink at all, including underage children.

“What if my friends ask me to drink?”

Helping your child say “no” to peer pressure is one of the most important things you can do to keep him or her alcohol-free. Work with your child to think of a way to handle this situation, whether it is simply saying, “No, I don't drink,” or saying, “I promised my mom (or dad) that I wouldn't drink.”

“You drink alcohol, so why can't I?”

Remind your child that underage drinking is against the law, and for good reason. Point out that adults are fully developed mentally and physically so they can handle drinking. Children's minds and bodies, however, are still growing, so alcohol can have a greater effect on their judgment and health.¹



“Why is alcohol bad for me?”

Don't try to scare your child about drinking or tell him or her, “You can't handle it.” Instead, tell your child that alcohol can be bad for his or her growing brain, interferes with judgment, and can make him or her sick. Once children hear the facts and your opinions about them, it is easier for you to make rules and enforce them.

References

1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking: A Guide to Action for Educators*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, 2007.