

The Kinship Connection

For grandparents raising grandchildren



Alcohol is RISKY BUSINESS for young people

Alcohol is risky business for children and teens. The longer young people delay alcohol use, the less likely they are to run into problems as a result. A recent survey found that 32 percent of all 8th Graders said they drank alcohol in the last year and 64 percent said that alcohol is easy to obtain. Many say they get it from their parents' liquor cabinets.

- Alcohol-related traffic crashes are a major cause of death among young people.
- Alcohol use is linked with teen deaths by drowning, suicide and homicide.
- Teens who drink are more likely to have problems with school work and school conduct.



Car crashes are the number one cause of death for ages 15-20.

- Teens who drink are more likely to be sexually active younger, to have sexual intercourse more often, and to have unprotected sex than teens who don't drink.
- Young people who drink are more likely to be victims of violent crime, including rape, aggravated assault, and robbery.
- The majority of boys and girls who drink tend to binge (five or more drinks for boys and four or more on for girls) when they drink.
- A person who begins drinking as a young teen is four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than someone who waits until adulthood to use alcohol.

Dear Grandparents,

The dreaded questions: "Did you drink alcohol when you were a teenager? Did you smoke? Hopefully, you can answer these questions with a resounding, "No, I did not and you should not either." Unfortunately, for many of us, these types of questions are, well, *difficult* to answer. Age appropriate answers, without lying, are the best. If a young child asks, you can tell them that you prefer not to discuss it until they are older. However, a young teenager who is facing the same questions, requires an honest and direct answer such as, "Yes I did those things. I was wrong. I regret it. You should not make the same mistakes. It even led to trouble for me, and let me tell you about that."

The fact is, frank and frequent discussions with your grandchildren are essential to keep them from experimenting with alcohol and other dangerous behaviors.

In this issue, we'll look at some of the dangers of alcohol abuse and strategies you can use to keep their grandchildren sober and safe.

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WARNING SIGNS OF A YOUNGSTER WITH A DRINKING PROBLEM

All teens can be moody or withdrawn at times, get a bad grade or make questionable friends. Experts believe that a drinking problem is more likely if you notice several of these signs at the same time, if they occur suddenly, and if some of them are extreme in nature.

Mood changes: flare-ups of temper, irritability, and defensiveness.

School problems: poor attendance, low grades, and/or recent disciplinary action.

Rebelling against family rules.

Switching friends, along with a reluctance to have you get to know the new friends.

A “nothing matters” attitude: sloppy appearance, a lack of involvement in former interests, and low energy.

Finding alcohol in your child’s room or backpack, or smelling alcohol on his or her breath.

Physical or mental problems: memory lapses, poor concentration, bloodshot eyes, lack of coordination, or slurred speech.

Family strategies to avoid drinking

Kinship Connection always encourages families to enjoy a variety of activities together and to keep the lines of communications open with your grandchildren. These healthy family strategies are the best way to combat under aged drinking. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention encourage caregivers to:

- Work on a loving, trusting relationship with your grandchild.
- Make it easy for your teen to talk honestly with you. Be a good listener.
- Talk with your grandchild about alcohol facts, reasons not to drink, and ways to avoid drinking in difficult situations.
- Keep tabs on your young teen’s activities, and join with other parents/grandparents in making common policies about teen alcohol use.
- Develop family rules about teen drinking and set consequences. Rule #1, drinking alcohol is forbidden.
- Set a good example regarding your alcohol use.
- Encourage your child to develop healthy friendships and fun alternatives to drinking.
- Know whether your grandchild is at high risk for a drinking problem; if so, take steps to lessen that risk.

CONTRACT FOR LIFE

Young Person

I recognize that there are many potentially destructive decisions I face every day. I commit to you that I will do everything in my power to avoid making decisions that will jeopardize my health, my safety and overall well-being, or your trust in me. I understand the dangers associated with the use of alcohol and drugs and the destructive behaviors often associated with impairment.

By signing below, I pledge my best effort to remain free from alcohol and drugs; I agree that I will never drive under the influence; I agree that I will never ride with an impaired driver; and I agree that I will always wear a seat belt.

Finally, I agree to call you if I am ever in a situation that threatens my safety and to communicate with you regularly about issues of importance to both of us.

Grandparent (or Caring Adult)

I am committed to you and to your health and safety. By signing below, I pledge to do everything in my power to understand and communicate with you about the many difficult and potentially destructive decisions you face.

Further, I agree to provide for you safe, sober transportation home if you are ever in a situation that threatens your safety and to defer discussions about that situation until a time when we can both have a discussion in a calm and caring manner.

I also pledge to you that I will not drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs, I will always seek safe, sober transportation home, and I will always wear a seat belt.

_____ Date _____
Young Person

_____ Date _____
Grandparent/Caring Adult

I found out that my grandchild was drinking! Now what?

Your grandchild's age, general behavior and situation need to guide your reaction. But no matter what the situation, you need to address this immediately and directly, making clear that the behavior is completely unacceptable and cannot happen again. We've compiled some of the best advice from a variety of sources:



Don't press the panic button!

1. Stay calm and rational so you don't close down communications between you and your child.
2. Make sure no one is hurt or nothing bad has happened as a result of the drinking.
3. Don't discuss anything while your grandchild is still under the influence. Put them to bed and discuss it tomorrow.
4. Have a complete, age-appropriate discussion about why drinking alcohol at their age is wrong and dangerous. Work hard to keep communications open.
5. Call the parents of other children who were involved. This is an important responsibility. Do not lay blame on other children (yours was there too!). If a parent lays blame on you or your grandchild, consider your obligation to the family complete and don't engage in an argument.
6. Age-appropriate consequences are in order. Groundings, suspended cell phone, TV, computer and other screen time are all effective. For drivers, be sure to take away car privileges until you're certain they will drive sober. Avoid taking away healthy activities such as sports or supervised after school programs.
7. Check with your health care provider about the need or options for treatment.
8. Check the warning signs for a child with a drinking problem (page 2).
9. Review your actions and house rules. Do you need to lock up alcohol in your home? Are your children home or at friends' homes without adult supervision? Is alcohol a family problem that may require a family solution?
10. Sign the Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) Lifetime contract (page 2). Your children may roll their eyes, but you'll be making an important point and commitment to them.

Model Healthy Drinking

Whether drinking alcohol for social or cultural reasons, parents **MUST** model responsible behavior by not becoming intoxicated and definitely not drinking and driving. In many cultures, teens drinking wine at dinner or on special occasions is perfectly acceptable.

Studies show that teens from "teetotaler" families may abuse alcohol because they don't learn how to drink responsibly or it becomes a "taboo" that they want to try. Allowing your child wine or champagne on special occasions is a family decision, but the same principles for educating your child about the dangers of alcohol apply.

Warning: Don't fall into the faulty thinking that you'd "rather have your grandchild drink at home where you can monitor them." That's a dangerous attitude that can set the stage for trouble and lifelong alcohol problems.

HOW TO HOST A TEEN PARTY

Agree on a guest list—and don't admit party crashers.

Discuss ground rules with your grandchild before the party.

Encourage your teen to plan the party with a responsible friend so that he or she will have support if problems arise.

Brainstorm fun activities for the party. Bored teenagers can invite trouble.

If a guest brings alcohol into your house, ask him or her to leave. Contact the child's parents.

Serve plenty of snacks and non-alcoholic drinks. *Be aware that some alcoholic beverages can look like flavored iced tea or sports drinks.*

Be visible and available—but don't join the party!

Do you have a drinking problem?

Drinking is a problem if it causes trouble in your relationships, in work, in social activities, or in how you think and feel. According to Alcoholics Anonymous, you may be an alcoholic if you answer yes to these questions:

- Have you tried to cut back or quit, but failed?
- Do you often have more than two standard drinks a day?
- Do you often drink more than you intend to or want to?
- Have people asked you to stop drinking in the last year?

Call it alcoholism, dependency, heavy drinking, or escape therapy, if alcohol is causing a problem in your life, then alcohol IS a problem in your life. In fact, if this article is getting you nervous, you may have a problem.

Try this interactive web site to see if you might have a drinking problem.
www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov

**Mark your
calendar!**



NEXT MEETING
**Grandparents Raising
Grandchildren**
Tuesday, January 25th at
5:30 pm.

Coming in March
Annual Wellness Night
Details to follow.

Local Contacts for Help

Cape Regional Medical Center, Center for Lifestyle Management, 609-436-4043;
www.caperegional.com.

Cape Counseling, 609-465-4100, ext. 134.

Cape Atlantic Intergroup, www.caigrp.org,
800-604-(HELP) 4357.

Cape Assist, www.capeassist.org,
609-522-5960.

Find an AA, Al-Anon, Alateen or Narcotics Anonymous meeting at
www.sobrietyonline.org.

*If you think your family needs help,
please reach out today.*

The Kinship Connection is published four times a year for grandparents raising grandchildren. The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group and all of Rutgers Cooperative Extension's educational programs are offered without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

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