

Know what to say and do to have a successful small talk



Small talks about underage drinking can make a big difference in a kid's choices. That's because kids really do listen. Research shows having frequent, casual conversations about alcohol, starting around age 8, can be a lot more effective—and a lot less intimidating—than one super serious discussion. So, start talking. Keep listening. Help give a kid the confidence to grow up alcohol-free.

What to do

Keep it casual

No fancy script or setting required. Just think about what you want to share with your kid before diving in, and take advantage of the one-on-one moments in your family routine.

Control your emotions

Be prepared to hear things you may not expect or like very much. Try taking a few deep breaths and keep listening. Wait to talk about your feelings when you're calm.

No answer? Don't panic

It's okay to admit when you need to learn more. Remember, you don't have to discuss everything all at once. It's better to have lots of short, casual talks as kids grow, anyway.

Set clear expectations

Make sure kids know that underage drinking is illegal and unacceptable. Set clear expectations for their behavior and enforce your house rules consistently.

Be an approachable resource

Become your kid's go-to for information and support—instead of friends or the internet—by taking all of their questions seriously and providing calm, easy-to-understand answers.

What to say

Ask open-ended questions

Get them talking by avoiding yes or no answers. Ask about their friends' choices, their school experiences, or their thoughts on the alcohol use they see in games, on TV, and social media.

Listen, listen, listen

Show kids you're interested in what they have to say. Ask questions and let their responses guide the discussion. Don't let the script in your head distract you from what's really being said.

Talk about the tough stuff

Kids can sometimes think of alcohol as a way to cope with stress or trauma in their lives. Give them a safe place to talk about those feelings instead—with you or with a licensed medical or behavioral health care provider.

Give them options

Warning kids about the dangers of alcohol is just the first step. Teach them about healthy alternatives to substance use, too—like exercise or meditation, enjoying music or gaming, learning a new skill, journaling, or spending time with people they trust.

Consider sharing your own story

Afraid to discuss your own underage drinking experiences? What you share is up to you. But revealing your own choices, regrets, or family history may help kids understand what's at stake.



Concerned about a kid's well-being?

Call 211 (1-833-944-4673)

The Wisconsin Addiction Recovery Helpline can help you find local services and support. It's free, confidential, and available 24 hours a day.

What can help

Stay involved

Share meals, share hobbies, and share time together. Have small talks on all sorts of topics, not just concerns like alcohol. Kids who feel close to parents and other caregivers are less likely to engage in unsafe behavior like underage drinking.

Know what (and how) they're doing

Keep up with your kid's activities and emotions. Know what they're doing and who they're with, and check on them with a call or text. They may roll their eyes, but they know you care.

Meet your kid's friends and their parents

Kids whose friends drink are much more likely to try alcohol themselves. Help kids choose healthy relationships, and make sure fellow caregivers know your alcohol-free rules.

Set a good example

Kids learn by watching those around them. If you drink, drink in moderation. Use music, laughter, exercise, or help from others to cope with everyday stress. Celebrate without alcohol, and secure the alcohol in your home.

Understand the law

It's illegal to drink and drive, and to provide a location for underage drinking. Supplying other people's kids with alcohol (even members of the military) is against the law, too, if they're under 21. Respect Wisconsin's laws and make sure kids understand them, too.