



**Together
we can**

TALK ABOUT ALCOHOL

Adults as Role Models and Influences

If you find it difficult to talk to your child about alcohol use, you're certainly not alone.

Even parents who give their child a clear "no-use" message about illegal drugs find it hard to be as tough with their child about alcohol use. After all, although it is a drug, alcohol is legal for adults to use and many parents do drink at home occasionally.

However, the social acceptability of alcohol is actually what makes it one of the most dangerous drugs your child will ever have contact with. What other drug can a child get hold of simply by opening the fridge at home? While drinking is often portrayed on television as being funny or sexy, illegal drug use rarely is. It is alcohol – not heroin, marijuana, cocaine, or other drugs – that is responsible for accidents resulting in the leading cause of accidental death for youth 15 to 24 years of age.

Prevention begins at home.

Parents are the *single greatest influence* on their child and have a major role in determining whether or not their child will experience alcohol or other drug related problems.

Set a good example.

Remember that children are mirrors. In front of them, even the most casual gestures and comments about alcohol use take on great importance. By setting good examples, you'll increase the chance that your child won't make risky decisions about alcohol or other drugs.

- › If you drink, let your child see you drink small amounts that don't produce intoxication. Also let them see you abstain from drinking at times and hear you say, "No thanks, I'm driving."
- › If you don't drink, explain to your child why you have made this choice. Point out examples of low-risk drinking, should they choose to drink as adults.
- › Show your child you are a responsible host by having non-alcoholic drinks available for guests, never "pushing" drinks, and by serving food with drinks.
- › Demonstrate positive ways to handle stress. Don't make casual comments about "needing a drink to relax," or "deserving a drink" after a difficult day.
- › Treat alcohol like a dangerous substance. Don't have your children serve you a drink and don't ask them to get you alcohol from the fridge.

Be aware of other influences.

Whether you're talking with them about it or not, your child is already receiving powerful messages about alcohol. These

messages are coming from their peers, the media and even from you own unconscious behavior.

As a parent or guardian, you can't control all the information your young child receives about alcohol. However, as the single greatest influence, you have the unique ability to prepare them for the peer pressure and onslaught of pro-alcohol messages to come.

Some suggestions to counteract pro-alcohol messages include:

- › Be selective about television shows, movies, and concerts that show alcohol and other drug use as normal and fun.
- › Point out the negative effects of alcohol use when you and your child are watching shows or commercials that portray alcohol use as funny or attractive.
- › Make sure your child's parties are chaperoned and that alcohol and other drugs are not available. If you have your doubts, don't be afraid to say "NO" to your child.
- › Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Know where your child will be, who they will be with, and what they will be doing.
- › Set reasonable curfews for your child and be clear about places and people that are off limits.

April is Alcohol Awareness Month



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For more information please visit the Vermont Department of Health website at:

<http://healthvermont.gov>