

# Talk to Your Children About Alcohol

Parents are key influencers in the lives of their children. Children tend to mimic the behaviour of those they love and admire and it is likely that your drinking habits are the ones your child will adopt later on. Since you are your child's greatest influence, making the choice to talk to your children about alcohol can help them to make conscious, informed, healthy decisions about drinking.

## Inform Yourself

To start the conversation about alcohol, it is important to understand why people choose to drink alcohol. Some reasons include to be sociable, to relax, to have fun, and to fit in with others. When adolescents drink, it is often for the same reasons, although fitting in is generally a stronger factor than it is for adults.

It is also important to know when people's choices to drink might be problematic. These may include drinking alcohol to avoid problems, relieve anxiety or stress, and to get drunk. There are also times that none of us should drink: for example, when we have important decisions to make, are engaged in dangerous activities, are operating vehicles or machinery, are responsible for someone else's safety, have physical or mental health problems, or are taking certain medications.

## Talk and Listen

The facts about alcohol are an important starting point for a conversation, but they are not enough. You want to offer your children guidance in making good decisions and saying no when they need to (refusal skills). You also want to develop clear, reasonable, safe and consistent rules and establish appropriate consequences that are applied consistently. Be prepared for your children to ask about your own drinking and other life experiences related to alcohol.

Let your children know that you are open to a conversation about alcohol with them and that you want to hear their thoughts. You can bring the topic up in response to a particular situation (e.g., at a family dinner where alcohol is served or in response to seeing people drinking in a movie) or in a more planned way (e.g., at a family meeting).



Use these tips to guide a productive discussion:

- Be concise and objective when explaining the facts about alcohol and discussing the pros and cons of alcohol use.
- Encourage questions.
- Be willing to listen at least as much as you talk.
- Try to understand your child's point of view.
- Keep the discussion going by avoiding lecturing.

Help your child to understand the difference between drinking in moderation and abusing alcohol. Canada's Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines (LRDG) contain research-based advice on moderate drinking. Conforming to the LRDG does not eliminate harm, but reduces its likelihood.

For teens up to legal drinking age, the LRDG recommend that they speak to their parents about drinking, never have more than one or two drinks at a time, and never drink more than once or twice per week.

From legal drinking age to age 24, the LRDG recommend that young people follow the same rules as adults aged 25 to 65, with one difference: those under 25 should never *on a single occasion* exceed two drinks for women and three drinks for men.

There are strong reasons for your teen not to drink alcohol at all: The authors of Canada's LRDG report that "alcohol can harm healthy physical and mental development of children and adolescents." Since younger people are also greater risk takers, they are also much more likely to be injured when they drink, and their injuries are often more serious. Furthermore, the later in life any of us starts to drink, the less likely we are to develop serious problems with alcohol. Every year a person delays starting to drink lowers the risk of alcohol problems. At minimum, according to the LRDG, teens should delay the first drink until the late teens and until reaching legal drinking age.

A relaxed attitude and open dialogue with your child can make an enormous difference in the choices they make and the consequences. If your child feels comfortable talking to you, you will be better able to guide them in their choices when it comes to drinking. Tell them that they can count on you if they need help. This may be a significant source of support if they experience difficulty. Having these conversations will help your child make sense out of what they see on TV, through social media, in the news, and at school.



## For More Information

Alberta Health Services offers a wide range of addiction and mental health services. For individuals looking for help for themselves or for someone they care about, the addiction line is available 24 hours a day.

**Addiction Helpline: 1-866-332-2322**

*For more detailed information on this topic and for other related information, go to the [Alcohol and Health Series](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca) at [albertahealthservices.ca](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca)*