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Establishing Rules About Alcohol

Age 14 Summary

Why Establishing Rules About Alcohol?

Whether discovering the liquor cabinet has been opened by your curious eleven-year-old or arguing over your fourteen-year-old attending a friend's unsupervised party, establishing rules about alcohol can help your family prepare for dealing with challenges cooperatively while building essential skills in your child/teen.

Tip: These steps are best done when you and your child/teen are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.



- Ask questions.
  - *"What are your hopes for your friendships?"*
  - *"What are you and your friends most interested in trying that's new and different?"*
  - "*Where do you like to hang out with your friends?"*
  - *"Does alcohol show up at parties with friends, and how do you feel about it?"*

Trap Avoid lecturing your child/teen when they are honest with you. Lecturing may result in your child/teen not sharing truthfully in the future for fear of your response.



- Learn together. Alcohol impacts a child's/teen's growing body and brain differently than it does in adults.
- Discuss values for family health and healthy development. Consider discussing the following questions:

- *"How do we keep healthy (diet, exercise, preventative doctor visits)?"*
- *"How do food and drinks fit into keeping your body healthy?"*
- *"Do you take medication? For what and why?"*
- *"What are some substances that alter your body and brain?"*
- *"How do those altering substances fit into a healthy lifestyle?"*

- Engage in a discussion about setting up rules about alcohol. You could ask, *"What might be some helpful rules we can stick to as a family?"*

Trap Don't allow sipping alcohol for any person under 21 since it sends a clear message that you think drinking by children/teens is acceptable.

Trap Some parents or those in a parenting role wonder whether allowing their children/teens to drink in their home will help them develop an appropriate relationship with alcohol. The opposite is true. Research shows that teens whose parents or those in a parenting role allowed them to drink at home or provided them with alcohol experienced the steepest escalation in drinking.



- Try out the new rules before your child/teen experiences peer pressure, and they are in a high-stakes setting.
- Discuss the role of a safety buddy with your child/teen and help them identify which friends they could count on to be a safety buddy. Initiate the no-risk pick up.



- Ask key questions to check in. "*How are the rules we've established? Are they reasonable to you? Are you struggling at all? Are the plans we set up, like your safety buddy, working out so far?"*
- Monitor their activities. Before they go out, be sure you know where they are going, who they'll be with, and how they are getting there. Verify when they'll be home. Offer a ride home. When they get home, be there to greet them, hug them, and discreetly check their breath.
- Recognize effort using "I notice..." statements like, *"I noticed how you called me when you were uncomfortable. That's taking responsibility!"*
- Stay engaged. Be ready to talk when your child/teen is eager.
- Engage in further practice. If your child/teen shares challenges, explore how you can create additional plans to help them feel supported.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

Trap Don't create a situation where your rules are so tight, strict, and inflexible that you invite your child's/teen's rebellion. Show that you value their opinions and are reasonable. Learn together about the risks so that you are revisiting rules as a team. Children/teens must understand (and review) the importance of rules and why they are reasonable.



Recognize Efforts

- No matter how old your child/teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- You can reinforce your child's/teen's efforts in many ways. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three parenting behaviors impact your child's/teen's behavior differently.
    - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *"I noticed you designated a safety buddy and got home on time. -- love seeing that!"* Recognition can include nonverbal acknowledgment such as a smile, high five, or hug.
    - **Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the child/teen knows what to expect, like "*If you follow our plan and come home on time, you will get to stay up 30 minutes later than usual".* (if you XX, then I'll XX) The goal should be to help your child/teen progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. Rewards can decrease a child's/teen's intrinsic motivation if used too often.
    - Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent or those in a parenting role are in a crisis (like a child/teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering). To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role offers to stop for ice cream on the way home if the child/teen will stop arguing and leave the event). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, after your child/teen has a safe outing with friends and follows your family plan, invite their friends over for a game night at your house. Or, after your child/teen shares important information about how things have been going with friends, enjoy some hot chocolate together while you talk.

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