



Why Your Child Might Start Drinking Alcohol or Using Other Drugs

As kids approach their teen years, they begin to experience many developmental, emotional, and physical changes that aren't always easy. During this challenging time, some of them may choose to experiment with alcohol or other drugs.

For most kids, it's not just one thing that influences their decision whether or not to drink alcohol or use other drugs, but a combination of factors.

Stress

When kids worry about things like grades, fitting in, and physical appearance, they may drink alcohol or use other drugs to escape their problems.

What you can do

Encourage your child to participate in extracurricular activities as a healthier way to cope with their problems. Activities may include sports, music, art, other school clubs, volunteering, faith-based and community events, or group counseling.

Peer Pressure

From ages 11 to 18, youth are more likely to be influenced by friends, peers, family members, and the media/social media.

What you can do

Help empower and boost your child's confidence by teaching them realistic ways to say “no” to alcohol and other drugs. Practice those strategies together in a safe environment and remind them that real friends shouldn't pressure them to use substances.



Transitions

Life events such as changing schools, breaking up with a significant other, moving to a new community, or seeing their parents or caregivers get divorced can cause kids to turn to alcohol and other drugs as a way to cope.

What you can do

Explain to your child that life is full of ups and downs, and reassure them that things will get easier. Make sure they know that alcohol and other drugs are not the answer, and brainstorm better solutions together.

Environment

If kids grow up in an environment where their parents and caregivers, family members, or friends and peers drink alcohol or use other drugs frequently or view substance use favorably, they may be more likely to drink or use other drugs themselves.

What you can do

If you choose to drink alcohol around your child, be sure to do so in moderation and make sure they know that underage drinking and other drug use aren't acceptable. Avoid drinking or using other drugs and driving or getting in a car if the driver has been using substances. Know where you keep all of your alcohol and prescription medication, and always remind them that these substances are off limits.

Family History

Although a child's environment can influence if they drink alcohol or use other drugs, family history is also a key factor. Kids who have a history of alcohol or other substance use disorders in their family have an increased risk of developing alcohol or other drug-related problems themselves.



What you can do

If you have a family history of alcohol or other substance use disorders, have open and honest conversations with your child to make sure they understand the seriousness of these disorders. For information and materials to help you start the conversation, visit talktheyhearyou.samhsa.gov.

Use Screen4Success

Talking with kids early and often about the risks and dangers of underage drinking and other drug use can help keep them safe. But how do you know if your child needs more support, and where do you go to find it? Screen4Success will help you better understand your child's health, wellness, and wellbeing and find resources to help address their needs.

HELPFUL RESOURCES



Use and share Screen4Success.



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Subscribe and listen to the “What Parents Are Saying” podcast.



Download and order “Talk. They Hear You.” materials online from SAMHSA Store.



Download and read other SAMHSA underage drinking prevention and reduction materials.



Download and read full “Tips for Teens” fact sheet series.