

## Talking to Youth about Alcohol

Spring is a great time of year to get back outside after a long winter and enjoy celebrations like graduation parties, Prom and Memorial Day Weekend. Spring is also a time when underage drinking tends to increase. Despite the numerous reports in the media on vaping and prescription drug abuse, alcohol is still the most commonly abused drug by youth. According to the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 54% of high school students drank alcohol in their life time; 39% of youth consumed alcohol in their home.

According to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), individuals that begin drinking at a young age are more likely to be alcohol dependent later in life. Furthermore, “over 40 percent of individuals who start drinking before the age of 13 will develop alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence at some point in their lives. Ninety-five percent of the 14 million people who are alcohol dependent began drinking before the legal age of 21.” With prom and graduation season upon us, now is the time to educate youth about the dangers of underage drinking.

Youth experiment with alcohol and other drugs for several reasons. Teens may feel insecure or feel a desire to be accepted by their peers. They may also experiment with alcohol as a way to cope with stress, trauma or transitions in life. Teens with mental health and behavior problems are at an increased risk to use or abuse alcohol. Alcohol abuse within the family is also a risk factor for underage drinking.

### Ways to Prevent Underage Drinking:

- Develop a trusting and open relationship with youth
- Set clear expectations
- Encourage healthy relationships
- Know your child’s friends and activities
- Do not drink with your child or allow them to drink in your home

It can be difficult to break the ice, take advantage of teachable moments in your daily life. Many movies and TV shows contain messages about alcohol that can be used as conversation starters. Be open about the dangers of underage drinking and the effects alcohol has on the developing brain. Be prepared to share facts and debunk myths about underage drinking. Also, use the opportunity to brainstorm alternate activities and strategies to handle peer pressure.

Taking the time to talk to youth about alcohol can be difficult, but it is worth it in order to protect their safety and well-being. There are several great resources available on the SCIP website to assist you in educating youth. In addition, Talkaboutalcohol.org provides many useful tips on how to talk to youth about alcohol.

### Resources:

<https://www.madd.org/the-problem/myths-and-facts/>

<http://www.talkaboutalcohol.org/parenting-styles>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/teen-drinking/art-20047947>

<https://drugfree.org/article/how-to-talk-with-your-teen/>

<https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/niaacollegematerials/factsheets/highschoolgradfactsheet.aspx>