

Know what to say and do to have a successful small talk



Your shared story is important—now and for future generations. You can help protect that story with small talks about underage drinking. Frequent, casual conversations are proven to impact kids' choices, and kids do listen. Research shows that having conversations about alcohol, starting around age 8, can be a lot more effective—and a lot less intimidating—than one super serious discussion. So, start talking. Keep listening. Help give a kid the confidence to grow up alcohol-free.

What to do

Be proactive

The best way to prevent underage drinking is to stay ahead of it. Don't wait until something happens. Talking early and openly about alcohol can give your kid the tools to feel empowered to make alcohol-free choices.

Encourage positive activities

Connect your kids to the activities and events that make your culture great. When kids stay busy and connect with others through healthy and positive outlets, they have less time and interest in exploring alcohol and other substances.

No answer? Don't panic

It's okay to admit when you need to learn more. Remember, you don't have to discuss everything all at once. It's better to have lots of short, casual talks as kids grow, anyway.

Set clear expectations

Make sure kids know that underage drinking is illegal and unacceptable. Set clear expectations for their behavior and enforce your house rules consistently.

Be a nonjudgmental resource

Become your kid's go-to for information and support—instead of friends or the internet—by taking all of their questions seriously and providing calm, nonjudgmental answers.

What to say

Ask open-ended questions

Get them talking by avoiding yes or no answers. Ask about their friends' choices, their school experiences, or their thoughts on the alcohol use they see at tribal events, on TV, and social media.

Listen, listen, listen

Show kids you're interested in what they have to say. Ask questions and let their responses guide the discussion. Don't let the script in your head distract you from what's really being said.

Talk about the tough stuff

Kids can sometimes think of alcohol as a way to cope with stress or trauma in their lives. Give them a safe place to talk about those feelings instead—with you or with a licensed medical or behavioral health care provider.

Don't keep score

It's tempting to correct kids when their info or opinions differ from your own. Avoid lecturing, using scare tactics, or trying to shut them down with facts. It'll keep the lines of communication open.

Consider sharing your own story

Revealing your own choices, regrets, or family history may help kids understand what's at stake. Remember, sharing your personal experiences and trauma can be difficult—and your health matters, too. But there's always help if you need it. Connect with a prevention partner or counselor to talk through these tough conversations.



Concerned about a kid's well-being?

Call 211 (1-833-944-4673)

The Wisconsin Addiction Recovery Helpline can help you find local services and support. It's free, confidential, and available 24 hours a day.

What can help

Stay involved and involve others

Lean on your community and connect with other parents, elders, and family members. Share meals, share hobbies, and share time together. Have small talks on all sorts of topics, not just concerns like alcohol. Kids who feel close to parents, other caregivers, and their community are less likely to engage in unsafe behavior like underage drinking.

Know what (and how) they're doing

Keep up with your kid's activities and emotions. Know what they're doing and who they're with, and check on them with a call or text. They may roll their eyes, but they'll know you care.

Meet your kid's friends and their parents

Kids whose friends drink are much more likely to try alcohol themselves. Help kids choose healthy relationships, and make sure fellow caregivers know your alcohol-free rules. And remember, we all share a great story and play an important role. So, look out for the other kids in your community, too.

Set a good example

Kids learn by watching those around them. If you drink, drink in moderation. Use music, laughter, exercise, or help from others to cope with everyday stress. When celebrating cultural traditions and ceremonies, celebrate without alcohol, or organize alcohol-free activities after events.

Understand the law

Tribal nations within Wisconsin are not exempt from state laws on alcohol. It's illegal to drink and drive, and to provide a location for underage drinking. Supplying other people's kids with alcohol (even members of the military) is against the law, too, if they're under 21. Respect Wisconsin's laws and make sure kids understand them, too.



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