

Parenting for Prevention of Underage Drinking

Children and youth are bombarded every day with incorrect information and mixed messages about alcohol. The reality is that alcohol is linked with health problems, violence, vehicle crashes, unwanted and unsafe sex, and other social problems.

Changing the alcohol use and abuse picture in any community requires us to “parent for prevention.” This involves looking at ourselves individually, looking at the community environment, and working with parents, caregivers, and other adults.



1. **Become educated** about the disease of addiction, risk factors, why people use, environmental influences such as availability and media promotion, and adult role modeling. Know the real facts.

2. **De-myth our thinking:**

- y A little beer won't hurt.
- y It's a rite of passage, all kids do it.
- y Thank goodness she only drinks and doesn't use something illegal.
- y I can trust my son not to drink and drive.
- y It's okay because my kid only drinks at home.

THE FACT IS: Alcohol use by adolescents leads more rapidly and more frequently to addiction than for adults. People who start drinking before the age of eighteen become addicted at much higher rates than those who start drinking later. Alcohol interferes with the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual growth of children and youth, and with critical childhood and adolescent brain development.

3. **Examine our own attitudes and role modeling.** The perception that alcohol use is the norm makes a young person more likely to use. Drinking patterns are learned at home.

4. **Know—and tell our children about—individual family risk.** People whose biological relatives are alcoholic are at higher risk for addiction if they choose to use. High tolerance for alcohol (they can drink a lot) indicates a person is at high risk for addiction.

5. **Understand and warn against youthful patterns of alcohol use.** Young people tend to binge drink. They seek intoxication. They can drink themselves to death.

6. **Learn the signs** that a young person is using alcohol and seek professional help when needed.

7. **Take parenting education classes.** Few of us have been prepared for this most important responsibility. Most of us could improve our skills.

8. **Help children develop resilience:**

- ~ Teach them steps for making wise decisions.
- ~ Role play how to “say no” and avoid risky situations.
- ~ Model and create opportunities for good, two-way communication.
- ~ Encourage self-expression.
- ~ Foster situations and use language that promote healthy self-esteem.
- ~ Nurture developmental assets (*building blocks of healthy development*) of children and youth.

9. **Become involved in providing alternative activities for youth** and a variety of means for recreation, community service, creative expression, civic engagement, and personal achievement.
10. **Examine the community environment in regard to alcohol**
 - access to alcohol
 - enforcement of laws and ordinances
 - consistency of school and community policies and their enforcement
 - advertising and other marketing/industry influences
 - adult role modeling and attitudes about youthful use
 - sources of mixed messages
 - influences on community norms such as college culture, tourist trade, etc.

Then participate in making needed changes.
11. **Network informally with other parents, or join or create a formal parent network.** Establish community standards. Improve the environment. Support children in making no-use choices. Provide safe activities and celebrations.
12. **Create and participate in community coalitions** that work for healthy community norms, a safe environment, adequate services, and opportunities for all children. In time, other people and their children influence our own.

Resources

Education

- C Substance Abuse Coordinating Agency Prevention Coordinators — Call Prevention Network for local numbers, 1-800-968-4968.
- C Alcoholism, signs, family risk — Call Michigan Resource Center's Substance Abuse Referral Line, 1-888-736-0253.
- C Written materials and free video loans — Call Michigan Resource Center, 1-800-626-4636.
 - Request:
 - T *Publications Catalog*
 - T *Video Catalog*
 - T *Michigan Parent Handbook*
 - T *Parenting Awareness Month Organizers' Packet*
 - T *Materials Order Form*
 - T *Ask for their suggestions*

Parent Networks and Community Coalitions

- C For local referral — Prevention Network, 1-800-968-4968, or e-mail pnooffice@preventionnetwork.org
- C School District Safe & Drug Free Schools Communities Committees — check with local school districts
- C Parent Teacher Student Associations — Michigan PTSA, 517/485-4345; or www.michiganpta.org

Parenting Education—check local phone book listings for

- C Local and Intermediate Schools Districts
- C Community Mental Health Offices
- C MSU Extension Offices
- C Child Care Coordinating Councils (4C)
- C PTSA Chapters
- C Local hospitals
- C Religious institutions
- C Human services agencies such as the Michigan Department of Human Services, Catholic Social Services, and Lutheran Social Services
- C Urban Leagues
- C Parent, family, or community resource centers