

TEENS AND ALCOHOL

Though drinking alcohol is illegal under the age of 21, alcohol continues to be the substance most abused by American teens.



By the end of high school, nearly three quarters of all students have consumed more than just a few sips of alcohol, and more than a third started as early as eighth grade ([National Institute of Drug Abuse](#)). 17.4% of teens confess to heavy use (binge drinking) within the past 30 days ([SAMSHA](#)).

While most adults learn to drink in moderation, teens admit that when they drink alcohol, they often drink to get drunk, and this can have damaging consequences for the adolescent brain, which until the age of 24-25, is still undergoing key phases of development. [Brain scans](#) are now showing discrepancies in the construction of

connections within the brain between teens who drink and those who don't, and these developmental changes are resulting in compromised cognitive function, including focus, memory and spatial functioning. In heavy drinkers, some development changes can be permanent and lead to life-threatening conditions.

The adolescent brain is primed for exploration and experimentation, so alcohol use is often seen as a common rite of passage. This makes it especially important for parents to give their teens and 'tweens clear messages about the repercussions of alcohol use, regarding both the physical dangers you're your own values and expectations of behavior. Kids who drink before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependency, and alcohol is a factor in the three top causes of death among 15-24 year olds.

But research also overwhelmingly reveals that children whose parents talk often to their kids and convey clear messages make more responsible decisions. Experts recommend that parents talk to their children about possible problem issues two years BEFORE they might be prone to engage in risky behavior. So talk to your adolescents – early and often.

The issue of "[Teens & Alcohol](#)" was recently addressed by the Brookline Wellness Summit. Check out information [Parent Update](#) on the facts and strategies/actions plans outlined by participants during this lively community forum. In addition, the summit addressed "[Teen Alcohol Use & Risky Sexual Behavior](#)." Read the [Parent Update](#) here.

For more information on [local resources](#) for teen alcohol abuse and related problems, go to <https://b-sapp.org/>

Check out this excellent tip sheet on [Ten Ways to Boost Parent/Child Communication](#).

If you know or suspect your child is using alcohol, The Partnership for a Drug Free America offers parents an online e intervention book [What to do if your child is drinking or using drugs](#).

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