

Talk About The Dangers Of Underage Drinking

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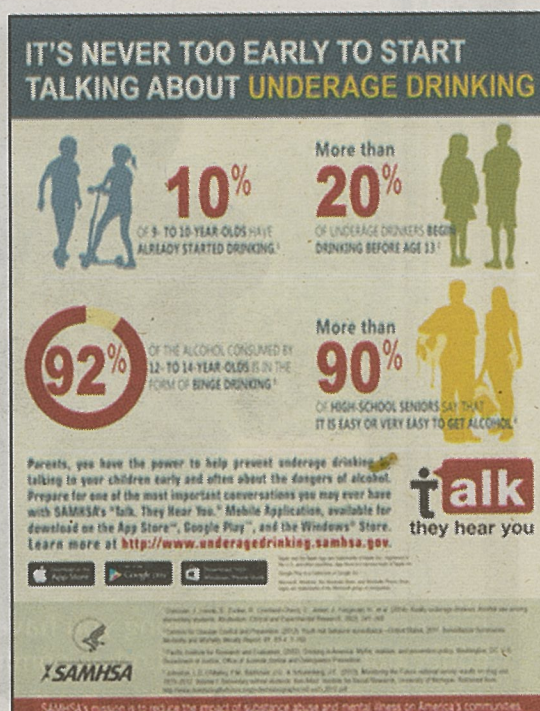
When it comes to underage drinking, the evidence is clear how alcohol and drugs impact the rapidly developing teen brain. Research shows that parents are the leading influence on their child's decision to drink alcohol under the age of 21.

Although not always apparent, when parents talk to kids about the dangers of underage drinking, the kids do hear the message.

Manhasset CASA's Talk. They Hear You. Campaign, as well as New York State's new Talk2Prevent Campaign, suggest parents talk with their children and t(w)eens about the dangers of underage drinking. A teen who begins drinking before the age of 15 is seven times more likely to develop an alcohol abuse problem later in life than someone who waits until 21 to drink. The reality of underage drinking for some of these teens and their families is they often do not see the long-term consequences (addiction, substance abuse, etc.) until after high school.

Sitting down for the Big Talk about alcohol or drugs can be intimidating for both parent and child. Manhasset CASA suggests using everyday opportunities to talk, such as during a car ride, at dinner or while watching TV together. Having lots of little talks takes the pressure off rather than trying to get all the information out in one discussion.

Use real world examples your kids know about, such as celebrities, sport figures and musicians who are too often in the news for their substance abuse.



"Hey I heard about...What do you think about that?"

Be honest. If there is a history of alcoholism or drug abuse in your family, tell them about it. If you can, tell them all the details about the struggle and how it impacts everyone in the family. If it is you, tell your kids your experience and treat it as you would any other disease.

"I worry because we aren't like everyone else,

and you have a higher risk for developing a drug or alcohol problem." Be real. Let them know just how dangerous it really is. "Did you know it only takes [this much] alcohol before you are too impaired to drive?"

Empower your child, ask them what they think and what they think you should know. "What do you think is the biggest issue facing teens today? How do you face it?"

State the facts. "I read that x in 10 kids your age are drinking. I know it might not be you, but it's probably happening with your friends and with people you know. Do you want to talk about it?"

Stay strong. Your kids may answer with a "yes" or "no," or may be defensive or angry. Don't stop the conversation. Take a breath and start again. "Did my question upset you? Why? Help me understand what you are feeling."

Be aware of and sensitive to their transitions, such as starting middle school or high school, a breakup, the loss of a friend or graduation. "This is a different time for you—are you scared, curious or concerned? I went through all this, too. Let me tell you how it affected me."

For more information about how to talk with your child about alcohol or drugs, go to underagedrinking.samhsa.gov or www.talk2prevent.ny.gov.

Little talks with real world examples



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