

Jackson County Drug Free Council, Inc.

April article

April is “Alcohol Awareness Month”, and this is the perfect time to bring up the subject of alcohol with your kids. It’s hard to believe, but the average age of onset for alcohol use is age 13. Talk to your grade school and middle school children about alcohol use...it’s not too early.

For many parents, bringing up the subject of alcohol is not easy. Take some time to think about how you want to proceed, and think about the questions they might ask you, and how you might respond. Don’t try to cover everything at once....the more conversations you have, the better. And remember, it should be a conversation, not a lecture! You might begin by finding out what your child thinks about alcohol and drinking.....this will open up the dialogue.

Many kids think they already know everything about alcohol although there are many myths and a great deal of misinformation. Here are a few facts you could share with your child:

- Alcohol is a drug, and slows down the body and mind. It impairs coordination, reaction time, vision, clear thinking and judgement.
- Beer and wine are NOT safer than hard liquor. A 12 ounce can of beer, a 5 ounce glass of wine, and 1.5 ounces of hard liquor all contain the same amount of alcohol.
- It takes 2 to 3 hours for a single drink to leave a person’s system. Nothing can speed this process, including drinking coffee, taking a cold shower or “walking it off.”

In talking with your child about reasons to avoid alcohol, stay away from scare tactics. Instead, discuss the consequences of alcohol use without overstating the case. Some good reasons why teens shouldn’t drink:

- Clearly state your own values, expectations and attitude about drinking. These mean a great deal to your child, even though sometimes they may not show it.
- Teens themselves, say that the best way to persuade them to avoid alcohol is to appeal to their self-respect - let them know they are too smart and have too much going for themselves to need alcohol as a crutch. Teens are likely to pay attention to examples of how alcohol may lead to an embarrassing situation or event – things that could damage their self-respect or alter important relationships.
- Drinking under the age of 21 is illegal. Getting caught will not only mean trouble with the authorities and in school, but it could damage how your

- friends and their parents perceive your child, and they may no longer permit their children to associate with your child.
- One of the leading causes of teen deaths is vehicle accidents involving alcohol. Drinking makes a young person much more vulnerable to sexual activity because it impairs judgement.
 - Drinking affects young people differently than adults. Their brains are still maturing, and drinking may lead to long-lasting effects and may even increase the likelihood of developing alcohol dependency later in life.

As you can see, there are many facts available. These alone may not be enough for your teen. Probably the most important thing you can teach your child about alcohol use, is how to handle peer pressure. Brainstorm with your child about certain situations that might come up, and discuss various ways that your child could handle the situation. Let them know that if they are somewhere where there is underage drinking, all they have to do is call you to pick them up, and there will be no scolding or punishment, because they did the right thing.

Discussing alcohol use with your child is a starting point, and should continue throughout your child's middle and high school years. Keep that line of communication open, so they know that they can talk to you about this anytime. But there are other things that you can do besides have conversations with your kids.

Monitor the alcohol in your own home.....make it clear that you do not allow parties or gatherings in your home when you are away. Do encourage your child to have friends over when you are home, this is the best way to get to know your child's friends.

Connect with other parents, keep track of your child's activities and whereabouts.....let them know you do this because you care, not because you don't trust them.

Last, establish clear "no alcohol" rules with your children.

- Kids will not drink alcohol until they are 21 years of age
- Older siblings will not encourage younger brothers and sisters to drink, and will not provide them with alcohol.
- Kids will not remain at a party or gathering where alcohol is being served
- Kids will not ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking.