
I N S I G H T S

FOR FAMILIES

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How to Start Talking to Your Teen

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❖ INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Reprinted from the Web site of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), <http://www.madd.org>

If you're in the trenches of parenting teenagers, here are some ideas on how to start talking to your kids about alcohol use.

- ❖ **Don't accuse:** When you bring up the subject of underage drinking, don't make your children feel as if you are accusing them in advance.
- ❖ **Listen to them:** Let your children know you value their opinions and ideas by listening. Then, explain your opinions and ideas—back them up with well-researched facts. The phrase kids hate most is "Because I'm your father" or "Because I'm your mother."
- ❖ **Seal a deal:** Ask your driving-age child: "What are the things you think we should write down in an agreement that would help us feel relaxed about your driving? What do you think?"
- ❖ **Have dinner with them:** Teens who have dinner with their families two nights a week or less are at double the risk for substance abuse than teens who have frequent family dinners, according to The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA) September 2003 report, "The Importance of Family Dinners."
- ❖ **If they don't want to talk:** Let them know that before they go out with friends, they will need to tell you who they will be with and what they plan to do. Similarly, before they drive, let them know there will be a meeting to discuss the rules that everyone will participate in regarding use of the car.
- ❖ **Set clear consequences and be consistent:** After the ground rules are established, set and enforce clear consequences for breaking those rules.