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THE  
**power**  
TO take a  
**stand**

MOTHERS AGAINST DRUNK DRIVING  
**THE 411 ON TEEN DRINKING**

# Alcohol and Teens - Knowing the Facts

The teen years can be a confusing time, but one thing is clear – you're not a kid any more. You are becoming mature in many areas of your life, and learning to make your own decisions. Some of the decisions you make today will affect you for the rest of your life. No one can make them for you, but having good information will help you make good choices.

In this booklet we're going to give you the 411 on teen drinking and why it's so important to avoid alcohol before you turn 21. We'll explore the impact of alcohol on a teen's health, safety, social life, school performance, and relationships with friends and family. We'll show you how to make smart choices. We'll help you talk with your parents about drinking and, finally, we'll show you ways you can take a stand against teen drinking and protect people you care about.

## Why Teens Drink

You probably know some teens who drink. Maybe you've even tried it yourself. Teens give lots of reasons for trying alcohol – to celebrate a special occasion, for example, or out of curiosity. Some teens think alcohol will put them in a better mood or make them feel less awkward. Others drink to fit in. They figure, "How bad could it be if everyone is doing it?"

The truth is, teen drinking can have very bad consequences, and not everyone is doing it. In fact, less than 30 percent of teens have had a drink in the past month. And only 20 percent of teens binge drink. **That means that the majority don't.**

## Adults Make Mistakes Too

Unfortunately, teens sometimes get alcohol from their parents or other adults, who think that kids should be free to learn from their own mistakes. Other parents may believe that if kids learn to drink at home, they'll be safer. Research proves them wrong. When teens feel they have their parents' approval to drink alcohol, they tend to drink more – and more often – outside the home. What seemed harmless at first often results in tragic consequences that even parents don't anticipate.

The media also adds to the problem. Many TV shows and movies portray teen drinking as fun and sexy, and fail to show you the real life consequences.



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# The Teenage Brain and Alcohol

Just the way your body is changing and maturing, your brain is developing too. During adolescence, your prefrontal cortex – the part of your brain that controls reasoning and helps you think before you act – is growing rapidly. This means that no matter how intelligent and mature you are now, you're not as good at decision making and problem solving as you will be when you're a bit older.

Your brain functions differently from an adult. Teens are more likely to:

- Misread other people's social cues
- Get into accidents or fights
- Engage in risky behaviors
- Focus on short-term fun instead of long-term consequences

## You can protect your brain

Because your brain is still developing, it is more easily damaged by drinking. Alcohol can harm many different parts of the brain, creating problems with coordination, emotional control, thinking, decision making, speech, and memory.

**These problems can be permanent.** It's easier than you think to damage your brain by drinking - and you may never get a chance to undo the damage. Isn't it worth waiting to drink until you're 21?

## Teens Drink Differently from Adults

Because alcohol affects the teen brain differently, teens are more likely than adults to engage in "binge drinking" – having at least five drinks at a time for boys, or four drinks at a time for girls. Sometimes teens plan to binge (saying, for example, "Let's go out and get hammered!"). Other times, they get caught up with drinking games or parties that get out of control.

Teens get drunk **twice as fast as adults**, and have more trouble knowing when to stop. In addition, adolescents who binge drink risk dying from alcohol poisoning. They are also more likely to:

- Be pushed, hit, or attacked
- Be sexually assaulted
- Be seriously injured
- Drive drunk or ride with a drunk driver
- Engage in risky sexual behavior



### Casey's Story

Everyone who knew Casey Taylor considered him a "good kid". He was on the wrestling team, played football, sang in the choir, played in the marching band, and still managed to stay on the honor roll.

Casey was 18 the night he and his friends stopped at a drive-up liquor store that didn't card underage buyers. The boys bought rum and decided it would be fun to see how much just one person could chug. That person was Casey.

Around noon the next day, a police officer came to his parents' door to give them the awful news that Casey had died. Two days later, they got the coroner's report: Casey's blood alcohol content was .41--more than five times what is considered the legal limit for someone over 21.

"Earlier that month, I had found a bottle of rum Casey had hidden in the garage," says his mother. "I just threw it away and didn't say anything." It's her biggest regret. "I only wish I'd put the bottle right on the kitchen table and talked with him about it. Maybe he would have made a different choice."

# What's So Bad About Underage Drinking?

Underage drinking can lead to all kinds of bad consequences you may not have thought of. For example:

## You Can Get in Big Legal Trouble

Most teens know it is illegal to drink under the age of 21, but they don't realize how harsh the consequences may be. For instance:

- Police do get complaints about parties – and they may arrest everyone who has been drinking underage.
- It is illegal to drive after drinking any amount of alcohol. If you're caught drinking and driving:
  - You could face expensive legal fees.
  - You could lose your license.
  - You could be cited for purchasing or attempting to purchase alcohol.
  - You – and your family – could be embarrassed publicly, since these arrests are reported in newspapers.
  - Your parents may have to take time off from work (and lose pay) to go with you to court.
  - Your parents' car insurance rates could go up.
  - You may be denied entrance to certain colleges, based on their admission policies.
  - You might go to jail.
  - You might even kill or injure someone.

## Drinking Can Make You Sick or Pass Out

Drinking too much alcohol can make you vomit or pass out, and embarrass yourself in front of friends. This can happen suddenly, with little warning, and a bad "hangover" feeling can last for days.

## Drinking Might Lead to Being an Alcoholic

The younger a person starts drinking, the greater his or her chance for developing alcohol problems later in life. Adults who started drinking at age 15 or 16 are five times as likely to become dependent on alcohol as adults who started drinking after age 21.

## Drinking Can Lead to Risky Sexual Behaviors, Sexual Assault or Date Rape

Teens who drink are more likely to get themselves into dangerous situations and less able to get out of them.

## Your Grades May Suffer

Underage drinking increases the risk of failure in school.

## Drinking Can Lead to Early Death

Even one night of drinking can have life-changing results, including death from alcohol poisoning, choking on vomit, drowning, or fatal car crashes.

### Did You Know?

More young people die from alcohol related incidents than from all other illegal drugs combined.

### How Alcohol Affects Your Body

Alcohol is a drug that depresses the whole body. Starting with the first drink, alcohol begins to slow down judgment, coordination, and reaction time. As alcohol levels get higher, breathing and heart rate slow down – and can even stop.

### Why Wait Until 21?

Since the legal drinking age was raised to 21, more than 27,000 American lives have been saved – that's approximately 1,000 lives a year.

It's been proven that those who start drinking young are more likely to:

- Be injured while under the influence of alcohol
- Be in a motor vehicle crash after drinking
- Get into a physical fight after drinking

Plus, those who have their first drink before age 19 are much more likely to become alcohol dependent, drive after drinking, and sustain injuries that require medical attention.

In addition, high school students who use alcohol or other substances are five times more likely than other students to drop out of school.



# Driving Safety

## It's a Fact

Anyone who has been drinking cannot accurately tell how drunk he or she is.

It is illegal for teens to drink *any* amount of alcohol and drive. Even with a small amount of alcohol, teen drivers are more likely than older drivers to be in a crash after drinking, because of the way alcohol affects teens. In fact, vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens age 15 to 20.

***Never get in a car with a driver who has been drinking, even if the person is trying to sober up.*** After drinking alcohol, the liver gradually removes it from the body and bloodstream. This process takes time and there's nothing you can do to speed it up. That means that drinking coffee, getting some fresh air, eating, exercising, or taking a cold shower **doesn't work**.

Make an agreement with your parents or a trusted friend to pick you up if you need a ride. It's also a good idea to carry enough cash with you to take a taxi home if you need to.



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# Talking With Your Parents about Alcohol

There may be times when you want to talk with your parents about alcohol – or they want to talk with you. Even though this may feel awkward, it's good to keep the lines of communication open. Your parents are on your side and want you to be safe, and they offer a perspective you can't get from your friends.

If you are facing any challenges related to drinking, get your concerns out in the open and ask for their support.

Let your parents know that you hear what they're saying. You don't have to agree with them, but it's important to try to see things from their point of view and respect their opinions.

It's normal for parents and teens to argue, so it's important to stay on topic. Don't let conversations about drinking get sidetracked by other issues or old arguments. If the discussion doesn't go the way you hoped, be patient. Your parents probably feel as awkward as you do.

Talking openly about alcohol can build mutual trust. If you show your parents that you want to behave responsibly, they will be more likely to trust you – and they may reward that trust by giving you more privileges and independence.

## What if a family member has a drinking problem?

By the time they reach age 18, one in four kids in the United States has lived with a family member who has a drinking problem. You are far from alone. If you are concerned, don't be afraid to talk with a teacher, doctor, or other adult you trust.

There are also many organizations that can help. You can start by calling the government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 24-hour helpline at 800-662-HELP. The service is free and confidential.

## I'm worried about my friend.

If you think your friend may have a problem with alcohol – for example, if he or she drinks regularly, drops out of usual activities, drives under the influence, or seems like a different person when drinking – speak up. Don't worry that you'll get your friend in trouble. Your friend is already in trouble, and your help may save his or her life.

If you're nervous about the conversation, think about what you're going to say ahead of time. Pick a time when your friend is calm and sober, find a private spot to talk, and take a very supportive approach. Point out specific behaviors that worry you and talk about how they make you feel. Then listen to what your friend says, without judging.

Your friend may need more than one talk before he or she is able to "hear" you or admit to a problem. If you think your friend is in immediate danger – if he or she is talking about suicide, for example, or passes out and won't wake up – call 911 and talk with an adult you trust.



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# Making Good Choices

The choices you make today are setting the foundation for your future. Staying on a positive path – and joining the majority of teens who don't drink – will help you reach your ultimate goals and dreams.

Successful teens report that one of their biggest challenges is resisting peer pressure and the desire to "fit in." Some of these pressure tactics may sound familiar:

- "Come on, everyone has tried drinking."
- "If you won't drink with us, then why are you hanging out with us?"
- "We drank once before, so what's the problem now?"
- "Come on, take a drink. It will get you in the mood."
- "We've been working hard. We deserve to party."

In order to stay true to your own values, sometimes it is helpful to be prepared for uncomfortable situations. Here is some of their advice for making good choices.

## Resisting Peer Pressure

Have some simple answers ready so that you can resist peer pressure without making a big scene or issue about it. If you answer in a natural tone of voice, your friends may not even notice. Try practicing:

- Simple one-liners: "It's just not for me; it's not what I want," "I don't drink," or "no thanks."
- Offering an alternative: "I'd rather have soda."
- Making an excuse: "I have a test to study for tomorrow."
- Giving a short explanation: "I really just don't like the taste."
- Changing the subject

Here's something else to think about: If your friends are pressuring you to drink, are they really good friends? Friendship should be based on respect, caring, and trust. A true friend is someone who wants you to be safe and happy.

## The Future Is In Your Hands

Remember, **not** everyone is drinking. Less than 30 percent of teens have had a drink in the past month. And only 20 percent of teens binge drink. **That means the majority of teens don't do it.**

As a teen, you have so much to look forward to – graduating, pursuing a career, having a family. High school is only a few years. The choices you make today will impact your entire life. Take a stand against underage drinking to give yourself, and the people you love, the best head start.



### Austin's Story

"My name is Austin Baltierra. I know the challenges and temptations teens face today. Growing up, we try to find ourselves and, naturally, we want to be liked and often base our self-worth on the approval of our peers.

The media doesn't help and can cause us to believe all teens drink alcohol even though most do not. While in high school, I realized that alcohol was not something worth risking my future or my life for. Instead, I focused on my family, my true friends, and my goals. I took school seriously and, during my free time, I would write, produce, and perform music. I soon made great friends and enjoyed collaborating with many of them on new music. Today, I am so grateful to be a student at Berklee College of Music. I set new goals every day and don't drink, because **I believe my future is worth it.**"

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The power of you(th). This is the power you hold as one teenager and as a generation to influence your peers, younger kids, and even adults by taking a stand against underage drinking.

Your generation has the privilege of living with research-proven facts about things people should do, like wearing seat belts and having air bags in cars, and things people *shouldn't* do, like using tobacco, driving drunk, and drinking under the age of 21. You know better than past generations, and more than that, you're looking ahead to your future—and not just concerned with looking cool today.

## Take a Stand

Join teens around the nation and use your power to take a stand:

- Participate in Red Ribbon Week school activities this October. Visit [madd.org/powerofyouth](http://madd.org/powerofyouth) for fun ideas.
- Use social media as a tool to influence others. Follow MADD on Facebook and Twitter and let your social network know about your views on underage drinking.
- Enter MADD's video contest to demonstrate your power to stop underage drinking and for a chance to win an iPad 2 at [madd.org/youthvideo](http://madd.org/youthvideo).
- Share this booklet with others.

**Your future is worth it. Use your power to take a stand.**

Use the following questions to guide group discussion about the information in *The 411 on Teen Drinking* presented by Mothers Against Drunk Driving®.

1. Do you think a person's judgment changes as he or she matures? Why? Do you see ways in which your own judgment has gotten better in the last few years?
2. Have you ever felt pressured to drink? Were you able to resist?
3. Have you ever wanted to try drinking out of curiosity? What choices did you make?
4. Would you tell your parents if you had tried alcohol? What do you think they would say?
5. Have you ever talked to your parents about drinking? What did they say, and how did it go?
6. Did any information in the booklet surprise you?
7. What would you do if you were worried about a friend's drinking? Have you ever had an experience like this?
8. Have you ever known anyone who was hurt or killed as a result of drunk driving? How did it affect the person's family, community, friends, or the driver?
9. How would your day-to-day life change if you lost your driver's license?
10. True or false:
  - a. Coffee can help someone who's been drinking to sober up.
  - b. Most teens drink sometimes.
  - c. Drinking can lead to sexual assault or risky behavior.
  - d. Drinking is harmless fun.
  - e. In some states, it's legal to have before age 21.
  - f. Illegal drugs are more dangerous than alcohol.
  - g. Drinking and driving is only illegal if your blood alcohol level is "over the limit."

Go to [madd.org/powerofyouth](http://madd.org/powerofyouth) for True or False answers.

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Founded by a mother whose daughter was killed by a drunk driver, Mothers Against Drunk Driving® (MADD) is the nation's largest nonprofit working to protect families from drunk driving and underage drinking. MADD also supports drunk and drugged driving victims and survivors at no charge, serving one person every eight minutes through local MADD victim advocates and at 1-877-MADD-HELP. Learn more at [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org) or by calling 1-877-ASK-MADD.

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