

## Risks of Tween Drinking

- Alcohol impairs the teenage brain. It can lead to problems with schoolwork and conduct, and could even cause memory loss and blackouts.
- Alcohol use is linked to youthful deaths by drowning, suicide, and homicide.
- Youth who drink alcohol early in life are much more likely to become dependent on alcohol later.
- Teens who use alcohol are more likely to become sexually active at an earlier age and are more likely to become victims of violent crime.

## Parents...Countering The Problem Of Tween Drinking

The facts are startling for alcohol and tweens-children between ages 9–13 (fourth through eighth grades)...

- One out of every two eighth graders has tried alcohol. <sup>1</sup>
- The first use of alcohol typically begins at age 12. <sup>2</sup>
- Seven in 10 young teens say that alcohol is easy to get. <sup>3</sup>
- Almost half of youth who begin drinking before age 14 later become alcohol dependent. <sup>4</sup>

Even though these statistics are alarming, parents can do a lot to help tweens avoid alcohol. Many young people say that parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink alcohol. <sup>5</sup>

Many parents don't realize how much they can change or improve their children's lives, especially for tweens. However, parental involvement can be the safety net that protects tweens from drinking during the preteen years-years that can be confusing and difficult.

### The Tween Years

As tweens take their first steps from childhood to adulthood they often face a number of challenges. Tweens may find it hard to shift smoothly from elementary to middle school. New friends and settings provide social opportunities but also can create pressure as tweens try to fit in. Physical and emotional changes often bring an urge for independence and new experiences. Tweens may also begin to think that their base of parental support is weakening, and increasingly they may turn to the media, such as magazines, newspapers, and television, as well as their peers for cues on how to behave.

### Communication With Parents

Youth are much more likely to delay drinking when they have a strong and supportive relationship with a parent or guardian. Open and trusting communication is a vital part of such a relationship. Opening the [lines of communication](#) can start with many questions or comments. The following are examples:

- Encourage children to talk about their interests and activities and how they would like you to support those interests.
- Ask questions-ones that require more than a yes or no answer-so that children can tell you what they feel and how they manage emotions such as anger or intimidation.
- Start short conversations about the dangers of alcohol. Short frequent conversations are far more effective than a lecture.
- Ask your tween what he thinks about teen drinking.

According to a national survey, teen perceptions of immorality, harm to health, and parental disapproval are far more powerful deterrents to teen drinking and smoking than legal restrictions on the purchase of alcohol and cigarettes.<sup>6</sup>

Set clear "no use" rules about drinking because children are less likely to drink when parents establish firm "no alcohol" rules. These rules could include instructions such as:

- Not riding with any friends or peers who have been drinking
- Not staying at parties where alcohol is being served
- Not giving, asking, or taking alcohol from brothers or sisters.