

Talking to your Teen

In the past month two of our members were able to take in a Coalitions Connect seminar in Calgary and came home with new enthusiasm and excellent information. Following is a hand out that we found helpful.

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your son or daughter will be engaging in a conversation about alcohol and receiving information about the consequences of alcohol use in an upcoming CALM class. Alcohol use by youth aged 12-18 is on the rise; in particular, binge drinking is becoming an issue of concern with youth. The average age of initiation into alcohol use is 15.6 years, about the time they are in grade 9. This use of alcohol increases throughout the high school years, with approximately 77% of grade 12 students engaging in alcohol consumption.

Your teen is talking about alcohol. Teens talk about it in school hallways and online. In Biology class, they hear about the effects of alcohol on the body. In CALM class, they hear about how alcohol affects the decisions they make. Social Studies teachers are talking about broader policy implications. Your child is talking about it.

Like teens everywhere, your child faces a choice: to drink alcohol or not. If they choose to drink, they are faced with another choice: how much? When talking to your teen, first, be informed about the reality of alcohol and teens. Second, think about how your own behavior and attitudes about alcohol influence your children. Finally, talk to your kids, listen to your teens and be consistent.

Get Information

In Alberta, it is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to consume alcohol, but we know 77% of Grade 12 students are drinking alcohol and, of those who drink, 79.5% reported drinking to excess. (According to a Teyes survey in 2008)

Your Teen's Brain

Your teen's brain can be compared to wet cement: it takes on impressions easily, and is not yet ready to do the job it will do when it is mature. We don't always think of alcohol as a drug, but it is. Alcohol is a depressant drug that is present in beer, wine, spirits and liqueurs. Teens often don't know that alcohol has different effects, depending on things like how much and how fast you drink, your body size, whether you are male or a female, how much you have eaten, and how you are feeling. Teens are more vulnerable to harm from drinking because their brains are still developing and because they don't have much experience with the drug.

Your child cannot make decisions like an adult can. Instead of thinking about the long-term consequences, they may focus on the "good times" offered by drinking with their friends, how it helps to reduce inhibitions, or offers relief from stress. They also may not know how to

drink safely, and accidentally drink too much alcohol in too short a period of time. It is important for them to step back and slow down the decision-making process and explore all the pros and cons of their choices. It is important for them to think about these pivotal choices and we as parents need to help by talking to them early on, so they are ready to say "no".

Decisions about drinking are not only about the dangers of driving after consuming alcohol. Teens also need to think about other consequences like harm to the developing brain, and the physical and social harm that comes from arguments or fights. Teens need to know that drinking reduces self-control, so they may say or do things that they wouldn't usually do: this may embarrass them, injure, them, or harm them in other ways.

Teens Need To Talk To You

Parents are their children's strongest role model and greatest influence. Your teen will eventually adopt many of your values and ways of acting, just as you have been influenced by your parents. Your children notice and respond to the way you deal with problems, show feelings and celebrate special occasions. When you talk to your teen, you may have more influence than you think you have.