TIPS for Parents

The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute provides services to all those living on Treaty Lands 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10, and the homeland of the Métis. The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute is dedicated to moving forward on a shared path of reconciliation and partnership. We are all Treaty people.

Parents want to keep their children safe, including from the harms of alcohol. Talking about alcohol or other drugs with your child and adolescent is an opportunity to encourage healthy behaviours and help shape their beliefs, attitudes, and choices about alcohol use. You may feel reluctant or uncomfortable to talk about alcohol with your child.

This booklet offers ten useful tips for starting this conversation!

Some Terms Used in the Booklet

"*Adolescent*" and "*child*" are used interchangeably to refer to young people between ten and nineteen years old.

"*Parent*" refers to primary caregivers of a child, acknowledging that this may be someone that is not a biological parent.

Why it is Important to Talk about Alcohol

Starting conversations about alcohol early can support your child to make informed decisions about alcohol and other drugs. By providing accurate and reliable information on alcohol, you can help them understand the potential risks of drinking. These conversations will give your child the knowledge and skills they need to navigate peer pressure and prioritize their health.

A strong, open relationship with your child is a key protective factor. It can help delay their first drink and reduce the likelihood of developing alcohol-related problems later in life.

Preparing for Talking about Alcohol

Talking to your child about alcohol can feel challenging for many reasons. You might feel unsure about how to start, worry that you do not know enough, or feel uncomfortable addressing the topic. You can prepare yourself by learning more about alcohol use in young people and reviewing the tips in this booklet.

A strong and open relationship with your child is important for supporting their healthy development. Below are some things you can do to help nurture that connection.

- Communicate regularly
- Create an adolescent-friendly house
  (e.g., make your child's friends feel welcome)
- Stay involved in school activities
- Maintain family traditions while adapting to meet your adolescent's needs
- Find shared interests
- Encourage your child's passions
- Accept that wanting to try new things is normal at this age
- Be open to questions and conversation

Parents do not need to know all the answers.

If you do not have an answer to a question, you can suggest looking it up together. Doing this provides an opportunity to talk about ways to think about whether information you found is accurate and reliable.

A related booklet is available for youth, titled "Alcohol". This booklet can be used by adolescents and parents to learn more about alcohol, its side effects, and considerations to help reduce the risks.

This free booklet is available for order or download *(skprevention.ca, search 3-170)*.

Young people are more likely to consume a lot of alcohol in a short period of time. This is known as binge drinking.

Understanding Alcohol

Alcohol is a depressant drug, meaning it slows down the activity of the brain and slows reflexes and reaction times. It makes people feel less alert.
In Saskatchewan, the minimum legal drinking age is 19 years.

Research shows that even a small amount of alcohol can be harmful regardless of age, sex, gender, ethnicity, tolerance, or lifestyle. Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health offers information to help people make informed choices around drinking. To learn more, visit:
https://ccsa.ca/canadas-guidance-alcohol-and-health.

Understanding Adolescent Alcohol Use

Not all adolescents try alcohol, but many do. It is important for you to know the reasons for using alcohol at an early age. This helps you to tailor your conversation. People drink for many reasons:

- fun or socializing
- relaxation
- celebrating
- dealing with stress, pain or trauma
- peer pressure

Young people might drink to experiment or push boundaries. Some will only try alcohol a few times, while others may continue to use alcohol regularly.


10
helpful tips
for talking about
ALCOHOL

TIP #1 START EARLY

It is never too early or too late to start having conversations about alcohol. Since alcohol is widely normalized, your teen may already face peer pressure to drink or have experimented with alcohol. Starting the conversations early increases the likelihood that your child can make informed, healthy decisions about alcohol.

Research shows that some children in Canada have their first drink as early as 13 years of age.

Talking openly provides your child with accurate information and helps debunk common myths and misconceptions about drinking. When you establish yourself as a trustworthy source of information, your child is more likely to come to you for help in the future.

Encourage your child to share details and discuss topics they consider important or find interesting. Allow them to talk and listen with willingness and attention. Avoid interrupting, even if you disagree. Interrupting or reacting critically can make them feel judged and hesitant to share in the future. When they are open to it, share age-appropriate information in a calm and non-judgmental way.

Make regular conversations about health-related topics, including alcohol, a natural part of your relationship. Ongoing discussions help reinforce key messages and ensure your child remembers and understands the information you share.

TIP #2 SHARE FAMILY VALUES & SET BOUNDARIES

Your family's values and beliefs can influence your child's behavior. Talking openly about these values allows you to share your expectations regarding alcohol use in a respectful and genuine way.

Before starting the conversation:

- think about the values and beliefs regarding alcohol use that are important for you.
- consider why these values matter and how they guide your family's decisions.

Living by your values reinforces their importance and shows your child that they are principles you stand by.

Set clear, realistic expectations for your child's behaviour. Children benefit from having clear boundaries, even if they occasionally test them. They need to clearly understand what the family rules are and what the consequences of breaking them will be. Clear expectations help children make better choices and foster a sense of responsibility.

A strong parent-child relationship is important. When children feel close to you, they are motivated to meet your expectations because they want to maintain that connection.

TIP #3 STRIVE TO BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

Children see their parents as trusted role models. Your choices around alcohol can shape their attitudes towards it. By modeling healthy behaviours, you can be a good role model and teach healthy behaviours.

The following are some ways to set a positive example:

- practice healthy coping strategies
  (e.g., be physically active, talk to a friend)
- offer non-alcoholic drinks in social settings
- avoid making alcohol the focus of celebrations or events
- plan a safe ride home if you choose to drink

Demonstrating healthy decision-making in your own life is one of the most effective ways to teach your child.

TIP #4 LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES & ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

Everyday activities such as watching TV or listening to music can provide natural opportunities to start conversations about alcohol. Encourage your child to think critically about the messages they see or hear.

Discuss alcohol-related messages in ads, social media, or song lyrics.

- *"Do you think the way drinking is portrayed is accurate?"*

Talk about the choices made by characters in movies:

- *"How do you think alcohol influenced their decisions or life goals?"*

Share real-life incidents involving alcohol (from personal experience, the community, or the news) and ask:

- *"What do you think about what happened?"*

Conversations can take place anywhere but be respectful and try to avoid embarrassing your child.

Broaden the discussion by talking about a variety of health topics, not only alcohol use. Invite your child to share their opinions and experiences, even if they are different from your own.

Visit https://ccsa.ca/alcohol-quiz
for a fun and educational quiz on alcohol
to explore facts about alcohol together.

TIP #5 CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR COMMUNICATION

Creating a safe and open environment for your child to talk is important. When your child feels heard and supported, they are more likely to share their thoughts and seek your guidance in the future. This can strengthen your relationship and help your child make healthier, informed decisions.

Sitting side by side, such as in a car, or walking together can feel less awkward and make it easier for both of you to say what is on your mind. Having fun or using humour can also help to overcome awkwardness.

Listen carefully to your child's concerns and feelings. Show them that you value their perspective, even if you don't always agree. Let them know that their safety comes first to you, especially when you discuss difficult topics like alcohol. Make sure they understand that they can depend on you for help if they are worried about their own or a friend's safety.

Leave the conversation open by saying something like:

- *"Let me know if there is anything else you would like to talk about."*

If your child does not feel that they have a safe space with you, they will seek out answers elsewhere. This means they might get inaccurate information or advice that conflicts with your family's values.

TIP #6 BE HONEST

When your child asks questions, respond honestly. If they ask about your past or current alcohol use, share the truth in a thoughtful and age-appropriate way.

Even if you drank alcohol at a young age, this should not stop you from discouraging your child from doing so. If it feels right, you can share relatable stories from your own life. Remaining calm, listening carefully, and responding honestly will make you a trustworthy source of information.

Be honest when you do not know something. If you do not have the information your child needs, or your child is not comfortable talking about something with you, help them connect with someone who can help. **See TIP # 10.**

TIP #7 SHARE THE EFFECTS OF USING ALCOHOL

Children often have limited knowledge about alcohol and its harmful consequences. They may also receive confusing information or have misconceptions about its effects. As a parent, it is important that you share correct and relevant information as they grow.

If you do not talk about the risks of underage drinking, your child might not see any harm in trying alcohol and other drugs. Discuss the immediate (short-term) and lasting (long-term) harms of alcohol use.

Short-term harms can include:

- alcohol poisoning (potentially life-threatening), hangover, lapses in memory, poor decision-making and risk-taking (e.g., unprotected sex, or drunk driving).

Long-term harms can include:

- brain damage, diseases of the liver and heart, certain cancers, problems in school, conflict, social isolation, and legal problems.

Since adolescents are more likely to binge drink, include the potential risks in your discussions. Binge drinking during adolescence can impact brain development and increase the likelihood of injury and harm. It can also increase the risk of alcohol dependence later in life.

Remember,
fear tactics often fail. Instead, focus on having supportive, non-judgmental conversations. Being honest and sharing accurate and balanced information can help your child make informed health choices.

Alcohol Use, Driving, and Laws

Driving under the influence of alcohol is dangerous and carries serious legal consequences. Saskatchewan imposes penalties for drivers with a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) greater than 0.04.

Saskatchewan has zero tolerance for impaired driving among new drivers. This includes anyone 21 years of age or younger and holders of a Class 7 or Class 5 Novice 1 or Novice 2 driver's license.

Visit the Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI) website for details:

https://sgi.sk.ca/high-alcohol-level

TIP #8 TEACH & PRACTICE SKILLS TO SAY NO

Peer pressure can impact choices and behaviors. Even if your adolescent wants to say no, they can sometimes find it difficult. Learning and practicing ways to say no can help them to confidently avoid risky situations. Below are some ways to navigate situations where alcohol is offered.

Be direct and honest:
Simply say “No thanks, I’m good” or “I’m not drinking tonight”.

Offer a reason:
“I’m driving”, “I have an early morning”, “I am focused on my health”.

Keep it casual:
Hold a non-alcoholic drink so you don’t feel pressured to accept a drink.

Redirect the conversation:
Change the subject or focus on something fun happening. Surround yourself with people who respect your choices.

Be confident:
Remember, you don’t owe anyone an explanation for your decision.

There may be times when your child needs help but worries about asking for your help in fear of getting in trouble. Make it clear that their safety is the most important thing, and if they or someone else is in danger, they can come to you for help.

TIP #9 STAY CONNECTED - PROVIDE GUIDANCE & SUPERVISION

As your child grows, simply talking about alcohol is not enough. You need to connect with and supervise your adolescent for their safety. This includes only having small amounts of alcohol in the house and making it so that your adolescent cannot access it.

Watch for changes in your child's behavior, such as:

- frequent mood swings
- losing interest in favourite activities
- having a new friend group and being secretive
- finding alcohol in their belongings
- signs of mental and physical health issues
- difficulties with school

Stay connected by being interested. Get to know:

- where they are, who they are with, and what they do
- how to contact them
- their friend's families and how to connect with them
- how things are going at school (by asking and attending parent-teacher meetings)

As they get older, if they choose to drink, reduce harm by guiding them to:

- ensure a safe ride home
- avoid binge drinking
- never drink alone

TIP #10 GET SUPPORT

It is not uncommon for parents to need support from the community. If your child does not feel comfortable talking to you, do not get offended. Encourage your child to talk to a trusted adult in your family or a reliable family friend.

Having someone else to share their thoughts and feelings with can provide additional support and perspective.

If you decide that as a parent you need help or support, do not hesitate or delay. You can contact your healthcare provider, or connect with a counsellor. You can also connect with organizations that offer programs tailored to meet the unique needs of children and can be a great source of support and guidance.

Remember to check in with your child to make sure they are getting the help they need.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Drug Free Kids Canada's Parent Support Hub
Live Chat or Call: 1-866-381-1511

Canadian Mental Health Association
https://cmhasaskatoon.ca
or 1-306- 933-6200

Family Service Saskatoon
https://familyservice.sk.ca or 1-306-244-0127

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Helpline
https://hopeforwellness.ca or 1-855-242-3310

Kids Help Phone
Text CONNECT to: 686868

Call a counsellor
(Toll-free): 1-800-668-6868

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Resource 3-180 03/2025