

Tips for Parents: Underage Drinking in California What Can You Do?



How Common is Drinking Among Youth? Drinking among U.S. teenagers is a serious problem.

Alcohol is the most commonly used drug among teens.

- ✦ 52% of eighth graders and 80% of high-school seniors have used alcohol at some time.
- ✦ 25% of eighth graders and 62% of high-school seniors have been drunk.



How Do Underage Drinkers Obtain Alcohol?

Most underage drinkers report it is “very easy” to obtain alcohol. Most get it from two sources:

- Third parties (e.g., legal-age friends, siblings, and strangers); and
- Commercial outlets, such as stores, bars, and restaurants (often by using a fake ID)

Home is the primary source of alcohol among the youngest drinkers, either stolen from parents’ supplies, or given willingly by some parents.

Alcopops are the newest trend in underage drinking. These fruit-flavored malt beverages come in colorful packaging similar in design to many teen-friendly soft drinks. They are called “flavored malt beverages” or “low-alcohol refreshers” by the alcohol industry, even though their alcohol content rivals most beers.

Risk Factors: Some teens are more likely to drink than others: although teenage girls are almost as likely to drink as boys, teenage boys are much more likely to regularly drink heavily.

Is Your Teenager Using Drugs or Alcohol? It is difficult to know when your teen is using alcohol, but look for these signs:

- ☑ **Mood swings** Mood swings are normal for teens, but look for extreme changes—your child acting happy and upbeat one minute followed by withdrawal or fits of anger or rage.
- ☑ **Secrecy** If your child begins to act with increased secrecy about possessions or activities it may be a sign for concern.
- ☑ **New friends** If your child is using, chances are he or she will be spending time with others who have similar interests. Is your child suddenly hanging around with new friends?
- ☑ **Changed school habits** Is your child skipping classes? Suddenly getting bad grades?



Common Myths About Alcohol

Myth: What parents say or do won’t make any difference; teens only listen to their friends. **Fact:** Parents can be very influential. A

study of adolescents and their families conducted by the Research Institute on Addictions revealed that adolescent girls and boys, regardless of race or income level, whose parents supervise their friendships and activities, are less likely to engage in problem behaviors, including drinking.

Talk With Your Teen About Alcohol

LISTEN. The key to effective communicating is being a good listener. With teens, it is important to make the time to listen to them, especially when they’re ready to talk. **KNOW WHAT TO SAY.** Find your own words, times and places that are comfortable for you to talk. **MAKE TIME.** Establishing regular “together time” with your child does a lot to encourage talking. **TALK ONE ON ONE.** If you have more than one child, try to talk to each one separately, even when it’s about the same topic.



As a parent or caregiver, you have vital influence on the life of your child. You serve as a role model on the use of alcohol, control the availability of alcohol in your home, and help set your child’s expectations concerning drinking behaviors. Use the information described here, and in the full Tips for Parents: Underage Drinking in California publication, to help prevent the youth you know from drinking underage.

Developed by the California Governor’s Prevention Advisory Council’s Underage Drinking Prevention Workgroup, the full publication “Tips for Parents: Underage Drinking In California...What Can You Do?” can be downloaded at www.safestate.org/underagedrinking. If you would like a hard copy of “Tips for Parents...” or to inquire about making the booklet state specific, contact Wendy Tully of the California Attorney General’s Office at wendy.tully@doj.ca.gov.