

# A guide for chatting with kids about alcohol

Little talks  
can have a  
BIG impact



**IF YOU'RE NOT TALKING TO YOUR  
KIDS ABOUT ALCOHOL, WHO IS?**







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## A BIT ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Manitoba youth say that their parents and family influence their life decisions – including how and when to drink alcohol. You have the opportunity to help your child make positive, informed choices about alcohol for the rest of their life. Talking to your child about alcohol will help them to understand alcohol and its effects.

Alcohol affects the way the body and brain develop, which is a major reason why children should learn about alcohol before they are faced with consuming it. That's why it's important to make alcohol use a topic of ongoing conversation.

This book may help you:

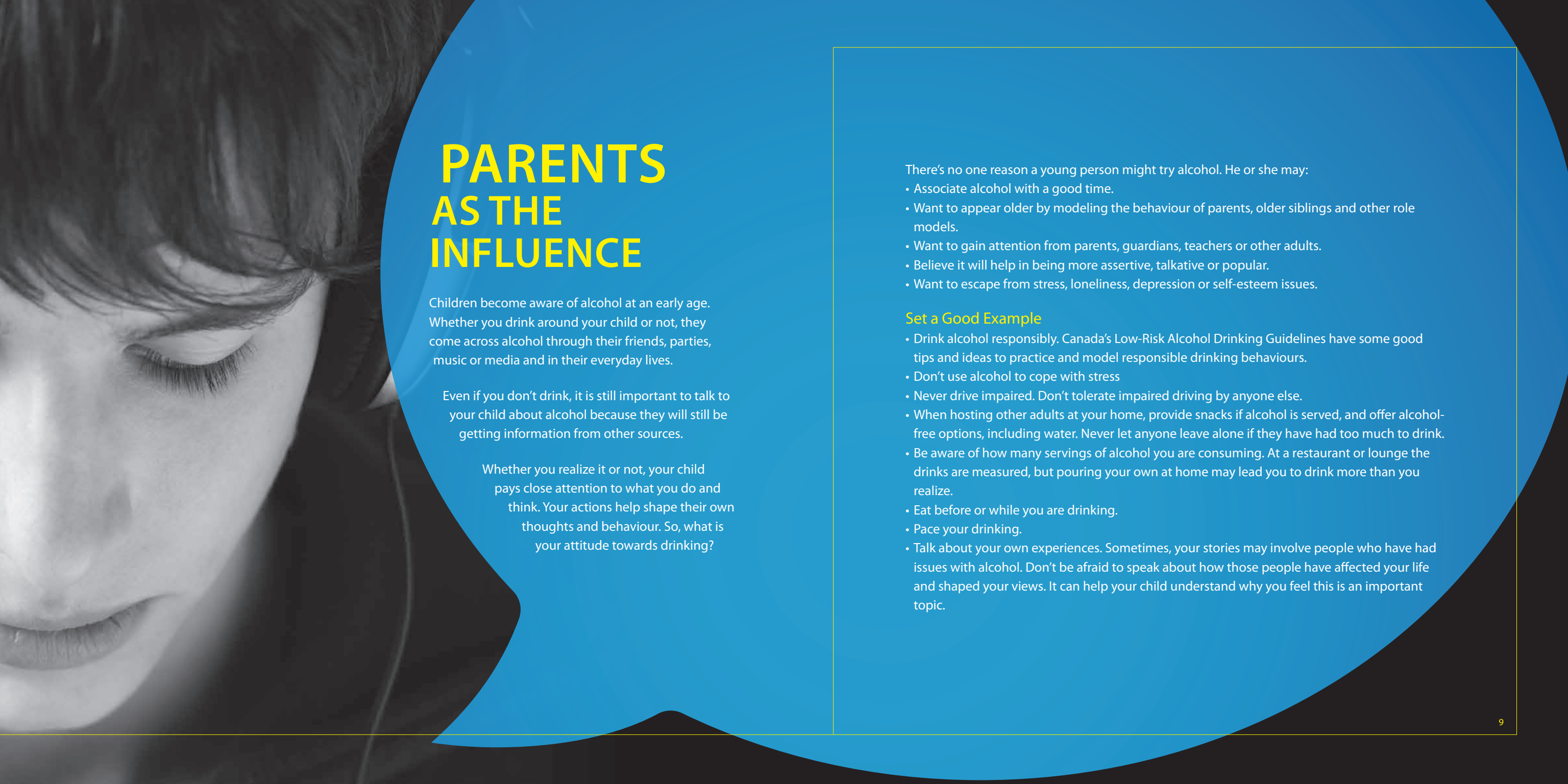
- Understand the issues and risks of underage drinking.
- Provide age-appropriate and factual information for your child.
- Have honest and open conversations with your child.

The suggestions in this resource are just that – suggestions. Read this booklet, then use your own voice in speaking with your child.

By talking to your child early on about alcohol it will help them to understand alcohol and its effects. You have the opportunity to help them make positive, informed choices about alcohol for the rest of their life.

### Did you know?

Almost one third of Manitoba grade 7 students have tried alcohol at least once in their life.



# PARENTS AS THE INFLUENCE

Children become aware of alcohol at an early age. Whether you drink around your child or not, they come across alcohol through their friends, parties, music or media and in their everyday lives.

Even if you don't drink, it is still important to talk to your child about alcohol because they will still be getting information from other sources.

Whether you realize it or not, your child pays close attention to what you do and think. Your actions help shape their own thoughts and behaviour. So, what is your attitude towards drinking?

There's no one reason a young person might try alcohol. He or she may:

- Associate alcohol with a good time.
- Want to appear older by modeling the behaviour of parents, older siblings and other role models.
- Want to gain attention from parents, guardians, teachers or other adults.
- Believe it will help in being more assertive, talkative or popular.
- Want to escape from stress, loneliness, depression or self-esteem issues.

## Set a Good Example

- Drink alcohol responsibly. Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines have some good tips and ideas to practice and model responsible drinking behaviours.
- Don't use alcohol to cope with stress
- Never drive impaired. Don't tolerate impaired driving by anyone else.
- When hosting other adults at your home, provide snacks if alcohol is served, and offer alcohol-free options, including water. Never let anyone leave alone if they have had too much to drink.
- Be aware of how many servings of alcohol you are consuming. At a restaurant or lounge the drinks are measured, but pouring your own at home may lead you to drink more than you realize.
- Eat before or while you are drinking.
- Pace your drinking.
- Talk about your own experiences. Sometimes, your stories may involve people who have had issues with alcohol. Don't be afraid to speak about how those people have affected your life and shaped your views. It can help your child understand why you feel this is an important topic.



# ARE YOU ALCOHOL AWARE?



341 ml (12 oz.) 5% alcohol or 142 ml (5 oz.) 12% alcohol or 43 ml (1.5 oz.) 40% alcohol or 341 ml (12 oz.) 5% alcohol = 13.5 grams ethyl alcohol

A woman feels the effects of alcohol faster than a man, even if their age, height and weight are the same. Women's bodies contain less water, causing an increase in blood alcohol concentration.

## Understanding Alcohol

Before you talk to your children about alcohol, know the basic facts.

- 1 Beverage alcohol (ethanol) is made by fermenting fruits, vegetables or grains. Another type of alcohol called methyl alcohol, or methanol, is found in products like hairspray and antifreeze and is poisonous to drink.
- 2 The drink sizes on the page opposite are the standard drink sizes, based on Canada's Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines. In their standard serving sizes, beer, wine and spirits all contain about the same amount of alcohol: 13.5 grams.
- 3 As soon as you drink alcohol, it enters your bloodstream. If you've recently eaten, the alcohol is absorbed more slowly. If your stomach is empty, the alcohol is absorbed faster and you feel the effects more quickly.
- 4 Once it's in the bloodstream, alcohol travels to organs and tissues, like the brain, liver, heart, kidneys and muscles. The liver breaks down about 90% to 95% of the alcohol you drink before being excreted through the kidneys.
- 5 Alcohol is a depressant, which means it slows brain activity and decreases tension. In small amounts, this can have a relaxing effect, but in large doses it can lead to coma or death.
- 6 Combining drugs and alcohol is a dangerous mix. Legal medication and illegal drugs can have a severe impact on how alcohol affects your body. Mixing alcohol with other depressants enhances the effects of alcohol.



Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines can help both adults and youth stay in control and make good choices about their drinking.

Visit [ccsa.ca](https://ccsa.ca). You can find the Guidelines under Priorities > National Alcohol Strategy > Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines.

Young people may not think about the long-term effects of alcohol. They may “live in the moment” or think of themselves as “indestructible”. Consider focusing on the immediate consequences of excessive alcohol consumption.

#### Immediate Physical Effects

- Losing consciousness (blacking out).
- Forgetting what happened.
- Blurred vision and slurred speech.
- Vomiting.
- Slower brain activity which can potentially lead to coma and even death.
- Alcohol poisoning, causing a severe drop in body temperature, loss of muscle control, and difficulty breathing and swallowing.
- Vehicle collisions if driving impaired or riding with an impaired driver.
- Injuring yourself or someone else.

#### Immediate Emotional and Social Effects

- Loss of emotional control.
- Making poor choices, including doing things you may regret later such as unsafe sex or fights.
- Legal consequences if caught impaired driving, assaulting someone or drinking when underage.
- Becoming a victim of violent crime.

Drinking may be considered a biological response to developmental issues that arise during puberty, including risk taking, sensation seeking and strong emotions. As a result, youth are especially likely to display hazardous patterns of drinking and to experience related injuries and social harms.



Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines send a message that a lower level of alcohol intake reduces risks for those who choose to drink – both for teens and adults.

While the Guidelines do help lower risk, it is important to note that some risks do remain with drinking at reduced levels. For example, research suggests that regular moderate drinking is linked to an increased risk to cancer and other diseases. Low levels of alcohol still have an effect on the functioning of the brain and body.

### Know your limits

To reduce the long-term effects of alcohol:

- Have no more than 10 drinks a week / 2 drinks a day for women.
- Have no more than 15 drinks a week / 3 drinks a day for men.
- Plan a non-drinking day every week to help avoid forming a habit.

### Delay Young People from Drinking

If you allow your teen to drink at home, on special occasions, you should ensure they:

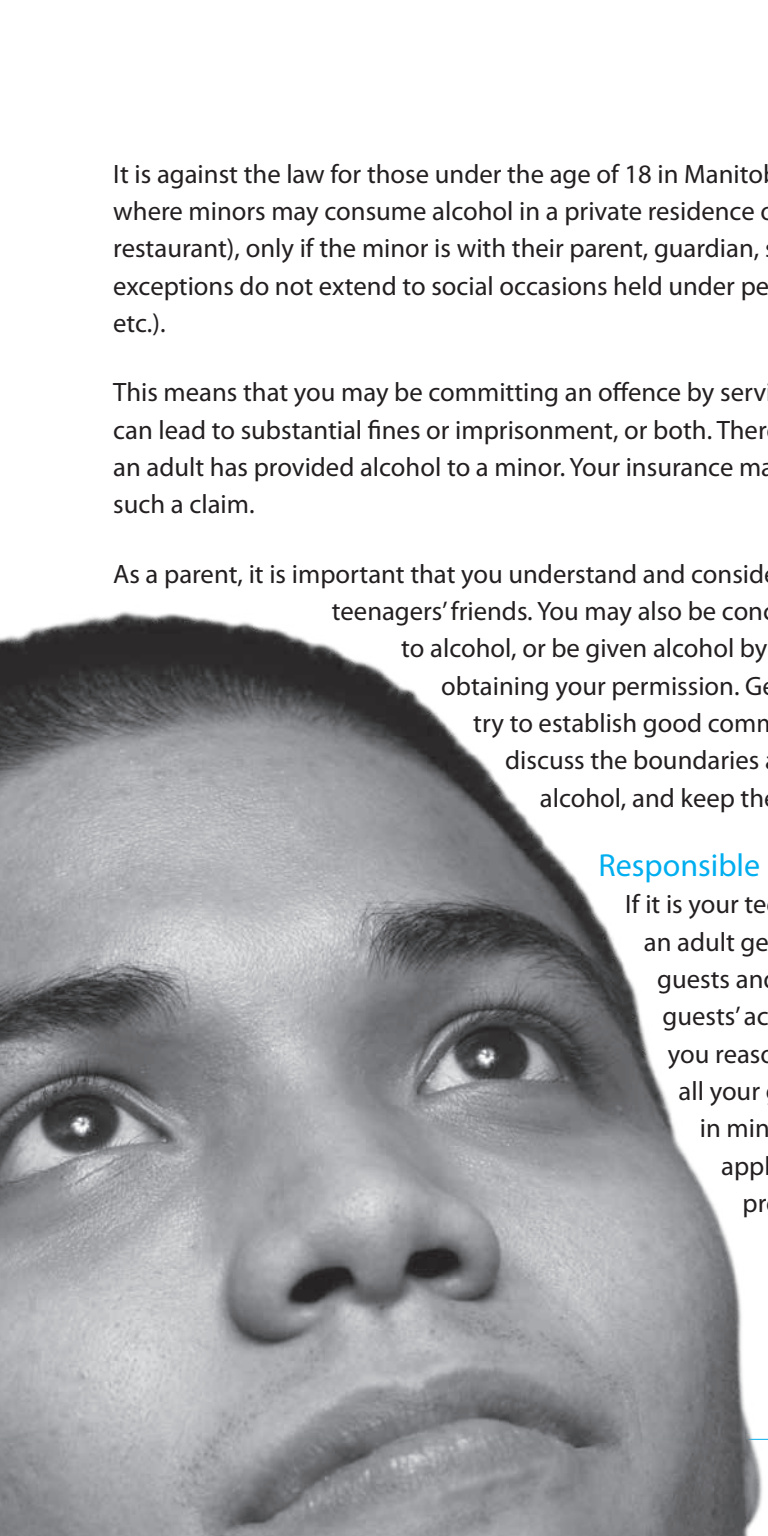
- Drink under parental supervision.
- Never drink more than 1-2 drinks at a time.
- Never drink more than 1-2 times a week.

### When Not to Drink

Sometimes zero is the limit. Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines suggest you should not drink when you are:

- Driving a vehicle, operating machinery or using tools.
- Taking medicine or other drugs that interact negatively with alcohol.
- Doing dangerous physical activity.
- Living with mental or physical health problems.
- Living with alcohol dependence.
- Pregnant or planning to be pregnant.
- Responsible for the safety of others.
- Making important decisions.





It is against the law for those under the age of 18 in Manitoba to be provided alcohol. There are exceptions where minors may consume alcohol in a private residence or at a licensed premise with a meal (such as a restaurant), only if the minor is with their parent, guardian, spouse or common law partner. Note that these exceptions do not extend to social occasions held under permit (such as socials, festivals, community events, etc.).

This means that you may be committing an offence by serving someone under the age of 18. These offences can lead to substantial fines or imprisonment, or both. There have been civil lawsuits in circumstances where an adult has provided alcohol to a minor. Your insurance may or may not provide coverage in the event of such a claim.

As a parent, it is important that you understand and consider these legal responsibilities as you host your teenagers' friends. You may also be concerned that your teenager may have access to alcohol, or be given alcohol by their friend's parents or other adults without obtaining your permission. Get to know your teenager's friends and families and try to establish good communication with them. It's a good idea for you to discuss the boundaries and limits you have set for your child in relation to alcohol, and keep the lines of communication open.

### Responsible Hosting

If it is your teenager hosting people in your home or you having an adult get-together, you have a responsibility for all of your guests and you may be held legally responsible for your guests' actions. This means that you will need to do all that you reasonably can to provide a safe environment, protect all your guests and help them avoid trouble. With all this in mind, ensure that you are firm, clear and consistent in applying your rules to all guests when they are on your premises.

If young adults will be consuming alcohol at your residence, here are some helpful tips to consider:

## UNDERSTANDING THE LAW IN MANITOBA

- Do not let minors consume alcohol unless their parent or guardian is also in attendance.
- Keep non-alcoholic beverages on hand for non-drinkers and designated drivers.
- Interact with guests as they arrive to identify those who may have consumed alcohol before arriving. Continue interaction throughout the event to monitor alcohol consumption.
- Limit guests to individuals you know so that you are alert to changes in behaviour that may indicate intoxication.
- If a guest is intoxicated, supervise them until they are sober or can be left with a sober and responsible person.
- Find out how guests will be going home from the party. Promote the use of designated drivers and keep telephone numbers on hand for taxis. If you can't get your guest home safely, insist that he or she stay overnight.

### Impaired Driving

Young people are at particular risk of injury or death from impaired driving. Approximately 45% of youth crash deaths are alcohol-related, and statistics indicate that one in every three people who dies in an alcohol-related crash is under the age of 25.

Impaired driving is against the law, and preventable. Manitoba is recognized as having some of the toughest anti-impaired driving legislation in the country, but you need to talk to your child about staying safe.

It is never too early or too often to educate your teen on the risks of impaired driving. Share the stats and make sure they know how much danger they could be in if they choose to drive after drinking or ride with a driver who's been drinking.

#### Learn more at

MADD Canada [madd.ca/madd2/en/services/youth\\_services\\_parents.html](https://madd.ca/madd2/en/services/youth_services_parents.html)

MPI [mpi.mb.ca/en/Rd-Safety/Impaired/Alcohol/Pages/alcohol.aspx](https://mpi.mb.ca/en/Rd-Safety/Impaired/Alcohol/Pages/alcohol.aspx)



# Talking

## over time

There's no "right" way to start the conversation about alcohol – and no single message that will reach all children. An age-appropriate discussion geared towards your child can help.

Begin building the foundation for ongoing, open discussion about alcohol with your child at a young age, with more serious talks as your child gets older.

You don't need to cover everything at once. In fact, you'll have a greater impact by having a number of age-appropriate, open talks rather than a one-time "lecture."

When an opportunity to discuss alcohol presents itself, start a conversation. Your child most likely has questions about alcohol they haven't asked. Make it comfortable to talk by remaining calm and caring, and by encouraging them to ask questions.

Here are a few things to keep in mind no matter what age your child is:

- Encourage questions. Listen to what they say without getting angry, negative or defensive.
- Answer when asked. Don't avoid the question.
- It's okay not to have all the answers. If there's something you don't know, tell your child you don't know, and then find the answer together. The time you spend learning together can make what you learn more meaningful.
- Help them feel comfortable enough to come to you with questions or problems in the future.
- Turn alcohol advertising to your advantage. Ask what your child thinks of the ad, and of alcohol in general.
- Speak to the situation. If you serve alcohol with dinner or to guests, that's an opportunity to speak with your child about your views and your personal rules about alcohol in the house.





### Preschoolers (ages 4 and under)

Kids this age are absorbing a lot of new information as they watch the world around them.

Spend quality time with your preschooler to create an environment where your child will feel comfortable coming to you to ask questions or discuss their feelings, ideas and opinions.

If you set a good example for your child from an early age, the more likely they are to drink responsibly in the future.

### School-Aged Children (ages 5-9)

At this age, children learn about alcohol from other children, and from TV, movies and what they see in real life. Talk to them about what they've seen and heard. Be sure they're getting factual information.

Grades 3 and 4 are critical years for forming expectations about alcohol. This is a good time to start talking to children about alcohol use and to encourage them to think critically about depictions of alcohol use in advertising and other media.

Children this age also often enjoy learning about how the body works. This can include learning about things that might harm the body. You can discuss things like:

- The way alcohol enters and moves through the body, describing how:
  - Alcohol enters the bloodstream;
  - The bloodstream carries the alcohol to other parts of the body;
  - The liver breaks down the alcohol; and
  - The alcohol leaves the body through urine, sweat and saliva.
- How alcohol can impair walking, talking and making safe decisions.
- How too much alcohol can make people feel sick with headaches, throwing up and shakiness.

Don't be scary, be factual. Explain to your child that even though there can be negative consequences to consuming alcohol, drinking responsibly is not dangerous for adults. You don't want your child to think you're doing something wrong or to worry about your health. The important thing for your child to understand is that they shouldn't drink and adults who choose to drink should do so responsibly.





### Preteens (ages 10-12)

Preteens are doing more things on their own, including choosing their own friends who will have influence.

- Know your child's friends and meet their parents when possible.
- Be aware of where your child is and who they're with.
- Establish clear house rules regarding alcohol and drinking, whether in the home or outside of it.

At this age, children begin to understand the concept of actions and consequences. Discuss things like:

- Laws regarding alcohol – age limits, misuse, impaired driving.
- Responsible drinking – including parental expectations and moderation.
- Family history if it involves alcoholism.
- More detailed effects of alcohol use on the body, including:
  - Bad breath and body odour.
  - Slow brain activity.
  - Weight gain because it is high in calories.
  - Blurred vision because it affects the signal between eyes and brain.
  - Dehydration.
  - A healthy liver can process about one standard sized drink per hour.
  - Excessive use causes dizziness, headaches and loss of control.
  - Excessive use kills brain cells over time (memory loss / brain damage).
  - Excessive use can cause liver failure and possibly lead to a coma.
  - Excessive use in the long term can kill liver cells and even cause liver cancer.





### Teens (ages 13-17)

Opportunities to try alcohol are increasingly present as teens get older. Stay involved in your child's life and be aware of who they are with and what they are doing.

- Re-establish house rules.
- Have family dinners.
- Answer your teen's questions.

When your teen wishes to invite people over:

- Be clear that house rules extend to guests.
- Confirm who they plan to invite and tell them to stick to the agreed-upon guest list.
- Encourage them to invite a responsible friend to act as the party's "co-host" to provide support if needed.
- Plan activities beforehand. Ask guests not to bring alcohol
- Serve food and non-alcoholic beverages.
- Let your child know they can contact you for help if necessary.
- Have your teen keep you informed of their plans. Check in regularly.


## Did you know?

Vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death among 15 to 25 year olds, and about half of those crashes involved alcohol.

Ensuring that your child understands impaired driving – what it is and what are the physical and legal consequences – can help them to make informed and responsible decisions.

For more information, visit:

- [gov.mb.ca/justice/impaired](https://gov.mb.ca/justice/impaired)
- [mpi.mb.ca](https://mpi.mb.ca)
- [afm.mb.ca](https://afm.mb.ca)



Above all, it is important to teach your teen to make smart choices in situations where they or others have been drinking.

### Young Adults (18+)

Young adults are more likely than older adults to consume alcohol in risky or dangerous ways, without considering short- or long-term consequences. Even though the decision to drink alcohol is ultimately theirs when they turn 18, you are still a big influence in their life.

- Encourage your child to consume alcohol responsibly.
- Try to be aware and involved in their life, even if they aren't at home. Encourage them to watch out for their friends who have been drinking.
- Encourage your child to plan ahead if they will be drinking. Suggest having a designated driver, taking a taxi or bus, or sleeping at a friend's. Never tolerate impaired driving.
- Remind them to eat before they go out and while they're drinking. Invite them for dinner if you know they're planning to go out later.
- Encourage them to pace themselves, to be aware of their limits, and to keep track of how many drinks they consume.
- Tell them to never leave their drinks unattended.
- Remind them to keep their cell phones fully charged in case they need to call or text you for help.
- Avoid pre-event drinking.
- Avoid taking the car to the event - take a taxi instead.
- Measure your drinks - do not free pour.

Start the conversation early, and talk often. The more you talk about alcohol, the more your child will understand the effects of their decisions, and will be comfortable talking about drinking.

- Keep discussions in the present tense, and talk about short-term consequences.
- Encourage your child to share with you what they already know, or think they know, about alcohol.
- Challenge what they think is socially acceptable behaviour regarding alcohol consumption.
- Don't just talk about the negative physical effects – talk about emotional and social effects of alcohol consumption.
- Remember that straightforward, two-way communication is the best way to reach your child at any age.





Four out of five  
grade 12 students  
reported drinking.  
Over half had  
more than five  
drinks in a typical  
sitting.

## BINGE DRINKING

Binge drinking, or getting drunk, is a problem among teens and young adults. Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines recommend no more than 3 drinks for women and 4 drinks for men in a single sitting. While some people may attribute their bad decisions to alcohol use, it is important for your child to understand that drinking is a choice. Talk to your child about taking responsibility for their actions.

Young people have a tendency to think "in the moment" and believe they are invincible or that bad things won't happen to them – that's why it's important to discuss some of the immediate consequences rather than focusing on long-term effects of drinking. Statistics and research show that teens are more likely than any other age group to be involved in traffic accidents, violent incidents and police trouble after drinking.

Teens who get drunk are more likely to:

- Get seriously hurt or hurt someone else, intentionally and unintentionally.
- Engage in unsafe or non-consensual sex.
- Get into physical or verbal fights with strangers, friends or boyfriends/girlfriends.
- Become victims of violent crimes such as robbery and assault.

Find out more about binge drinking and how to prevent it under BeUndrunk at [mbll.ca](http://mbll.ca).

As a parent, recognize that experimentation and mistakes happen. Understand that a teen's brain – especially the area for impulse control – is still developing. Help your teen to reflect on mistakes and learn from them.

Above all, it is important to teach your teen to make smart choices in situations where they or others have been drinking – and let them know they can always call or text you for help. They may be afraid to face judgment and rejection by their friends. If they know you're there for them, it makes dealing with the situation easier.



# TALKING OPPORTUNITIES

## Situations and Conversation Starters

Any situation where people drink or are exposed to alcohol or alcohol-related messaging is an opportunity to talk to your child about alcohol. Look for these “teachable moments.”

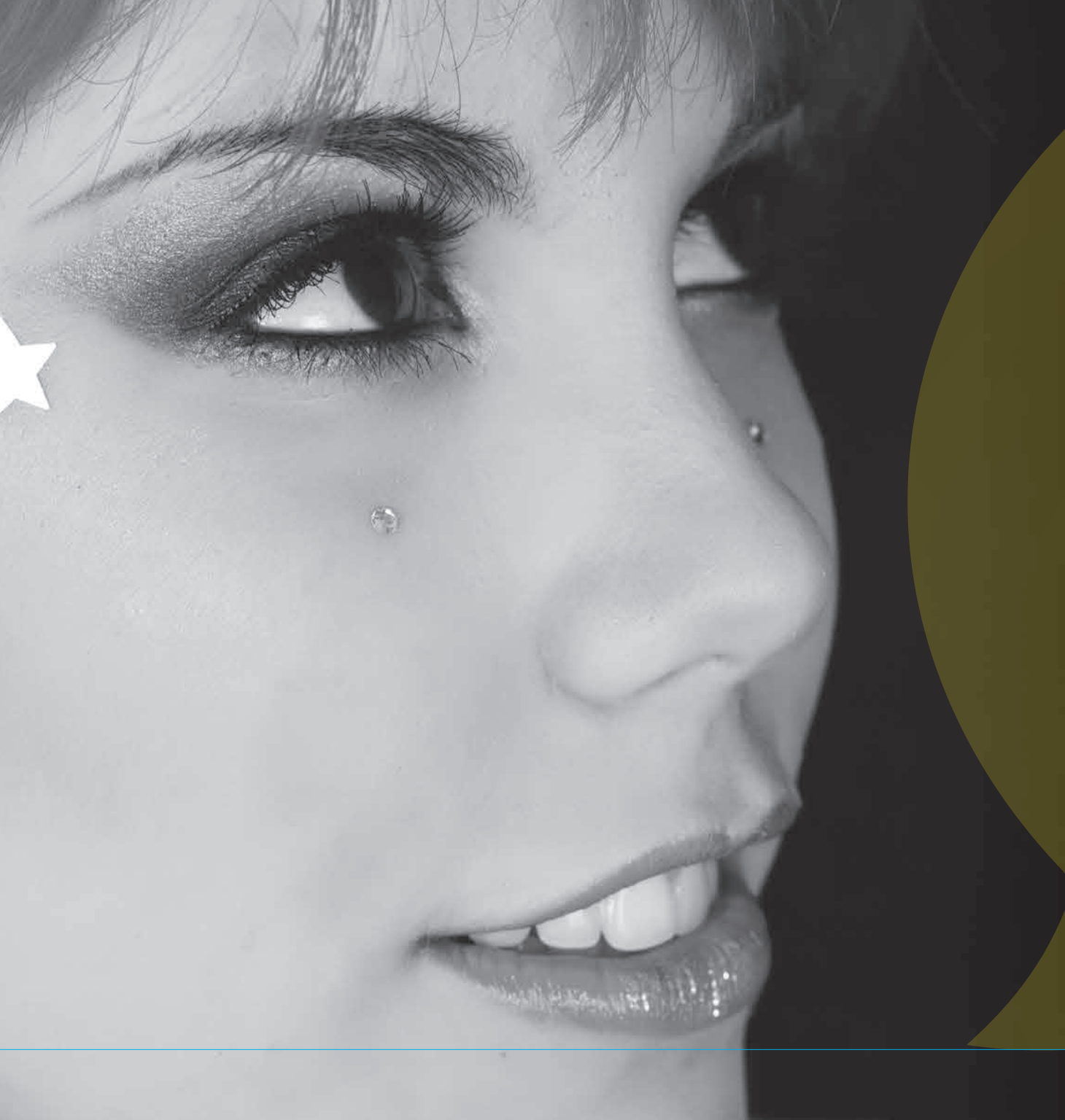
### Out at a restaurant or friend’s house:

- If you are having a drink with dinner, you or your child may bring up the topic of impaired driving. You may ask your child what they know and/or think about impaired driving.
- Your child may ask, “Why are you having a beer with dinner if you’re driving home?” This is a chance to talk about personal and legal limits. You can:
- Explain that one beer with dinner over the course of the evening does not put your blood alcohol content (BAC) level over the legal limit.
- Explain that you would never drive impaired, or get in a car with someone who is impaired.

### At your dinner table:

- Discuss the importance of eating before and while drinking – talk about how you feel the effects of alcohol faster on an empty stomach.
- Alternate alcohol with water or other non-alcoholic drinks to pace yourself.
- If you allow your child to have some alcohol, make sure your child knows that alcohol use is only acceptable when you are present and when you give permission. Don’t permit drinking outside of the home with friends. Make sure your rules are clearly established.
- Use this opportunity to learn about how alcohol affects your body.





#### **An event where alcohol is served:**

- This is a good chance to talk about how the atmosphere, not the alcohol, makes an event fun.
- If you're hosting, raise the question about what to do if someone drinks too much. Discuss how it is important to look out for your friends' safety, and plan ahead for a safe ride home.
- If you're out at a social event, you or your child may note someone drinking excessively. You could:
  - Ask your child what they think of the behaviour and if they really think it's "cool" to be drunk.
  - Ask if your child has seen any of their friends drunk. Or they may offer this information on their own – if they do, ask them to tell you how they felt about seeing their friend in that situation.
  - Be a role model – go and talk to your friend who's been drinking and encourage them to slow down.

#### **Watching entertainment where the characters are drinking:**

- Discuss appropriate and inappropriate drinking behaviour.
- Explain that children's bodies can't handle alcohol the same way adults can. Talk about how weight and gender can have an impact on how people feel the effects of alcohol, how children's brains are still growing and how alcohol can have serious effects on this growth.
- Point out that characters who get drunk often make poor decisions.
- Ask your child if they have ever felt peer pressure to drink. Ask them what they did in that situation, or what they would do.

#### **When you hear or see celebrity gossip about the latest impaired driving charges for young stars:**

- Ask what they think about the news – how will it affect their opinion of this celebrity?
- Talk about reputation. Many children think that getting drunk with their friends will make them more popular. Do they know that making a poor choice while drunk, or simply being drunk, could negatively affect their reputation?



**When purchasing alcohol:**

- Ask if your child has been around their friends when they have had alcohol:
- How did you feel about being around alcohol?
- Did your friends ask you if you wanted some?
- Did you try it? Did you feel pressured to say yes?
- Did they respect your choice not to drink?
- Where did your friends get their alcohol?

Chances are you're probably not around when your child and their friends are hanging out, especially if it's outside your home. Help your child say 'no' by giving them some useful tips – tell them their response will be stronger if they can:

- Remain calm.
- Be assertive and make eye contact.
- Stand up straight and act confident.
- Stay true to what they believe in.

You can also give them some ideas for lines to use when they need to say "no":

- If you want to, go ahead.
- I don't want to feel out of control.
- I don't want to do something stupid I'll regret later.
- I can't, I have a test/game/other responsibility tomorrow.





# Talking Effectively

## Set rules – and make them clear.

- Establish clearly stated house rules and consequences for not following these rules.
- Talk about consequences you face as an adult, such as legal consequences from impaired driving.
- Know where your child is, what they're doing, who they're with and what time they will be home.

## Help your child deal with stress and peer pressure.

- Talk about the things they feel stressed about, including peer pressure.
- Encourage them to find healthy ways of dealing with stress and boredom, such as hobbies or exercise.
- Teach them how to form healthy, supportive friendships.

## Be a good listener.

- Ask open-ended questions that give your child a chance to talk.
- Listen carefully to what they're saying.
- Respect their opinions and ideas.

## Show your child respect, care and trust.

- Create a safe environment where opinions and thoughts can be shared.
- Trust is crucial to a strong, honest relationship and it opens the door to good communication.
- Show an interest in their activities. If they know you care, they will be more willing to come to you for advice and to talk.

## Be aware if your teen is consuming alcohol.

- Monitor the supply of alcohol in your home.
- Make sure your child knows not to take alcohol for their own use.

# RESOURCES FOR PROBLEM DRINKING

Here are some warning signs that may mean your child is developing a problem with drinking:

- Rebellious against your household rules.
- Problems at school such as being late or absent, receiving low grades or getting in trouble.
- Mood swings and flare ups of temper, irritability and defensiveness.
- Lack of interest in personal appearance or former activities.
- Low energy, restlessness or depression.
- Physical or mental problems including memory loss, inability to focus and concentrate, glassy or bloodshot eyes, poor coordination or motor skills or slurring their speech.
- Loss of appetite.
- Unexplained injuries.
- Spending a lot of time alone or in their room.
- Making new friends and refusing to let you meet them.
- Financial problems.
- Money or articles missing from your home.
- Finding alcohol in their room or backpack.
- Finding them drunk, or smelling alcohol on their breath.
- Running away from home.

Every case is different and every child will show different signs if they have a problem. If you think your teen has a drinking problem take action and talk to them about it.

It may be difficult to know what to say or where to start, but there are resources available that can help.

For more information or to reach an addiction professional contact:

The Addictions Foundation of Manitoba

General Inquiries: 204-944-6200 or (toll-free) 1-866-638-2561

Youth Addictions Centralized Intake Service: (toll-free) 1-877-710-3999

Provincial Adult Addictions Information: (toll-free) 1-855-662-6605

[afm.mb.ca](http://afm.mb.ca)



**DrinkSense.ca**

