

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

That proverb certainly rings true when it comes to steering young people away from the devastation associated with alcohol use and abuse.

With studies on alcohol use by teens happening around the globe, researchers in the Netherlands have offered an encouraging piece of news that parents in America have long-hoped would be true: parents' attitudes on teen drinking can deter teens' use of alcohol. In fact, their studies suggest that parental disapproval can prove to be a powerful force in keeping teens from succumbing to the impulse to drink. Researchers have discovered abundant evidence that shows the longer teenagers delay drinking; the less likely they are to have problems with alcohol in the long run.

Parents who want to help their kids sidestep the pitfalls of alcohol use will need a few strategies for doing so. Here are a few:

Lead by example

As usual, the most important one goes first. If you want to deeply impact your kids' relationship with alcohol, live your life in such a way that you can genuinely say, "Do what I do," instead of having to say, "Do what I say." All of us - kids included - have a built in hypocrisy radar. Teenagers can easily spot the difference between "preaching" and "practice." So, don't just "talk" about the dangers of alcohol use, avoid them yourself, and encourage your kid to follow your example.

Tell stories

I'm a big believer in stories. Some of the biggest lessons I've learned in life revolve around my parents and mentors telling me stories. My parents effectively used stories to tell me about the damage alcohol caused my extended family and friends, people I personally know. Those stories communicated deep truths about real people's lives and experiences, and invited me in to wonder what would happen if I made the same mistakes. Stories put a face on the facts. We can learn from others' failures and successes, so let's share stories with our kids.

Equip them with strategies to beat pressure

Leading by example and telling great stories will only go so far; eventually, our kids will be tempted to drink when we're not around. Make sure to prepare them for this moment. First, tell them it will happen! Second, give them a few tools to rely on in those moments. That may include lessons on picking the right friends, knowing when to leave a dangerous situation, or even calling home in the midst of a temptation. However you choose to coach your kids, make sure they know their options for this inevitable moment.

As parents, we have a God-intended influence with our kids; it's part of His ingenious design. We need to take advantage of it as it relates to our kids' attitudes - and use - of alcohol.

by [David R. Smith](#)