

## **Teen Alcohol Use: Parents Have More Influence Than They Think**

Underage drinking is in part a youth problem, but it's also an adult issue. Over half of all high school age drinkers get their alcohol from an adult, according to SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Plus, half of those adults providing alcohol are parents or other family members. Although adults can be part of the underage drinking problem, they can also be part of the solution. About three-quarters of teens say parents are the biggest influence on their decision on whether or not to drink. Most parents want to do the right thing, but don't know how. Part of that can be knowledge-one out of every five teens binge drink, but only one out of every 100 parents thinks their teen binge drinks. Sometimes parents take an authoritarian style of parenting that causes them to lose their ability to influence their teen through reason. While others take a hands-off approach, or allow their teen to drink under their supervision, which makes it even more likely that their teen will drink more when away from their parents. Fortunately, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) had teamed up with Dr. Robert Turrisi of Pennsylvania State University to create the Power of Parents handbook. Based on Dr. Turrisi's research, this handbook gives proven tips on how to talk with your teens about alcohol in a productive, positive way. Parents who read the handbook and have the intentional conversation with their teens about alcohol can reduce underage drinking behaviors by as much as 30 percent.

Here are some tips from Dr. Turrisi's research:

1. Communicate before a problem starts. It's important to have discussions before incidents happen-prior to any blaming, anger or punishment
2. Discuss rules and consequences. Explaining how and why you expect your teen to behave, should allow for rational discussion of a sometimes emotional issue. Still, it's important to impart that you don't want your teen drinking. Discuss and agree on consequences of broken rules.
3. Show you care. Sometimes a gentle touch can help show affection for your teen during this tough conversation. Telling your teen you love them and want them to be healthy and safe is the reason why it's important to talk about the dangers of underage drinking together.
4. Pay attention. Even when life is stressful, it's important to make time to listen to your teen, know where your teen is and what your teen is doing.
5. Share family activities, including events such as dinner, to build a bond with your teen.
6. Give and get respect. When your teen talks to you, it's important to listen and reply respectfully, and to insist your teen do likewise.
7. Enforce consequences consistently. If your teen breaks the rules, stay calm and enforce the consequences you've agreed upon.

You can learn more or download the handbook at [www.madd.org/powerofparents](http://www.madd.org/powerofparents)

-Jann Withers, MADD National President

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