



Establishing Rules About Alcohol

Summary

Why Rules About Alcohol?

Whether it's discovering the liquor cabinet has been opened by your curious fifteen-year-old, arguing over attending a friend's unsupervised party with your sixteen-year-old, or your nineteen-year-old coming home with alcohol on their breath, establishing clear rules on alcohol can help your family prepare for dealing with challenges cooperatively while building vital skills in your teen.

Step 1. Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Ask questions. You might ask...
 - *"What are your hopes for your friendships?"*
 - *"What are you and your friends most interested in trying that's new and different?"*
 - *"Where do you like to hang out with your friends?"*
 - *"Does alcohol show up at parties with friends, and how do you feel about it?"*

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Learn together. Alcohol impacts a teen's growing body and brain differently than adults.
- Discuss values for family health and healthy development. Consider discussing the following questions:
 - *"What do we do to keep healthy (diet, exercise, preventative doctor visits)?"*
 - *"How do food and drinks fit into keeping your body healthy?"*
 - *"Do you take medication? For what and why?"*
 - *"What are the many substances that alter your body and brain?"*
 - *"How do those altering substances fit into a healthy lifestyle?"*
- Engage in a discussion about setting up rules about alcohol. You might ask: *"What might be some helpful rules we can stick to as a family?"*
- Change the conversation when your young adult turns 21. If you have a 21-year-old, the conversation changes to focus on choices about the healthy and safe use and non-use of alcohol.

Trap Don't allow sipping alcohol for any person under 21 since it sends a clear message that authority figures feel drinking by teens is acceptable.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Try out the new rules before your teen experiences peer pressure and they are in a high stakes setting.
- Identify with your teen their closest friend, and discuss the role of a safety buddy.
- Initiate the no-risk pick up.

Step 4. **Support** Your Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions to check in: *"How are the rules we've established? Are they reasonable to you? Are you struggling at all? Are the plans we set up, like your safety buddy, working out so far?"*
- Monitor their activities. Before they go out, be sure you know where they are going, who they'll be with, and how they are getting there. Verify when they'll be home. Offer the ride home. And when they get home, be there to greet, hug, and discreetly check their breath.
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like: *"I notice how you called me when you were uncomfortable. That's taking responsibility!"*
- Stay engaged. Be ready to talk when your teen is eager.
- Engage in further practice. If your teen shares struggles, explore how you can create additional plans to help them feel supported.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

Trap Don't create a situation where your rules are so tight, strict, and inflexible that you invite your teen's rebellion. Show that you value their opinions and are reasonable. Learn together about the risks so that you are revisiting rules as a team. Teens need to understand (and review) the importance of rules and why they are reasonable.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice small successes: *"I notice you designated a safety buddy and got home on time. Yes! Excellent."*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Include hugs, high fives, and fist bumps in your repertoire of ways to appreciate one another.

Trap Avoid gifts or other physical rewards for performance. These actually have a de-motivating effect on teens. When you remove the money, for example, have they internalized the skills and also the sense of responsibility for performing them? There's less of a chance if you've offered a "bribe." Focus on your attention as the best reward. This is an essential strategy in discipline for skill building.

Tip Be specific. “Good job” seems to not carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior - “*You called when you needed a ride - that’s so smart!*” - can promote more of the same.

Trap If you focus only on outcomes - “*You made your curfew*” - you miss the chance to influence the process. Better to say - “*You let us know where you were going, who you were going to be with, and when you were coming home.*”

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your teen’s success today and in their future!

Connect with other Montana parents about underage drinking and drugs at [LetsFaceItMt.com](https://www.LetsFaceItMt.com).

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