

# Keeping Your Child Alcohol-Free



## An Early Intervention\* Manual For Parents with Children in High School\* (Ages 14-18)

*\*Early Intervention means dealing with a problem when it is still at an early stage.*

*\*This Manual is also for Parents whose Children may have dropped out of High School*



Governor's Office for  
Children and Families





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# 1: Understanding the Risks

Your reading this Early Intervention Manual means that you have made a difficult discovery, the discovery that your teenager has been drinking alcohol. You are to be congratulated for not burying your head in the sand and pretending it's no big deal. However, you may still have some doubts or be second guessing about what you have discovered.

If this is the case, please take a moment to review the Warning Signs of Alcohol Use in Appendix 1 or see the Warning Signs posted in the Parenting Manuals section of the [www.StopAlcoholUnder21.org](http://www.StopAlcoholUnder21.org) website.

It is very important that you understand the risks involved regarding alcohol, and this chapter is designed to help you do that. It will also help you to share the facts about alcohol with your teen and avoid mistakes or exaggeration.

At this age your teen is going to be taking in information from their friends, the internet (especially via social networks like Facebook) and you. They are more likely to pay attention to what their friends say than to anyone else.

This manual will let you know attitudes you can have and actions you can take that will work and empower you and help your teen to become alcohol-free because the risks are great, but so are the rewards.

**If your teen has dropped out of school please skip to the section dealing with special challenges related to no longer being in school on page 5 below.**

## **Transition from Middle School to High School From a Big Frog in a Little Pond to a Little Frog in a Big Pond**

As your teen made the transition from Middle School to High School-- as is the case with most teenagers-- it's only natural that they experienced some anxiety about this move to a new school. Going from being a big frog in a little pond to a little frog in a big pond can be tough.

Typically at this time grades and attendance go down for many teens and peer pressure to drink alcohol goes up. As a parent you want your child to have a positive experience and a smooth transition during these early and formidable adolescent years.

Teenagers **can** successfully make this transition in a healthy and safe way. Great patience and support from their parents help them to do this.

### **Remember that your teen probably has concerns about:**

- 1) the new environment of the high school and whether they'll be able to navigate not only through the hallways, but also through the challenges of having tougher courses and more homework.
- 2) dealing with concerns about test scores that may impact future plans for college or technical school
- 3) stress associated with hormonal changes, dating and other sexually-related stressors
- 3) having new, stricter authority figures, rules and regulations.
- 4) having older students in the same school.
- 5) trying to fit in by meeting and making new friends.
- 6) dealing with bullies.

With all of the above taking place it's not a big surprise that so many high schoolers seek out not-so-healthy ways to deal with these newfound pressures and stressors.

Alcohol is marketed to youth in numerous, subtle and not so subtle ways in Georgia and throughout the U.S as a way to fit in, relieve stress and go through a rite of passage. And teens take many of their cues from that marketing.

### **If your Teen Has Dropped Out of School**

**The above statement about alcohol being marketed to youth holds true for all teenagers. If the decision to leave school has already occurred then it could have taken place for several reasons:**

- **Low or failing grades**
- **Unhappiness with the school**
- **Your teenager decided that pursuing their GED is a better fit for them**
- **Perhaps your teen was expelled from school**
- **Problems with alcohol or other drugs**

Regardless of the reason why your teenager is no longer enrolled in school, the decision was likely a difficult one for you and your teen. There are different stressors that pertain to teens once they are no longer in school.

- Pressure to find a job or keep a job if they already have one
- Fitting in with their friends since they now have less in common
- Having a boss to answer to if they are employed
- New responsibility of paying bills, especially if they are living outside the household
- More leisure time if they have not been able to find a job or have been fired from a job

## Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

Let's take a minute to review the terms "alcohol abuse" and "alcoholism." This will help you have a clear understanding of the differences between the two and have a better understanding of what they mean.

**"Alcohol Abuse"** refers to a pattern of alcohol use that leads to significant impairment in functioning. One of the following factors must be present within the last 12 months:

- recurring use of alcohol resulting in a failure to fulfill major obligations at work, school, or home
- recurrent use in situations which are physically hazardous (e.g., driving while intoxicated)
- legal problems resulting from recurrent use
- continued use despite significant social, family, or other interpersonal problems caused by the use of alcohol.

The symptoms do not meet the criteria for alcoholism -as described below.

**Alcoholism** refers to a history of drinking where the teen has become addicted to alcohol and- which includes the following:

- alcohol abuse (please refer to definition above)
- continuation of drinking despite life "going downhill." For example problems at school, work and home continue to get worse.
- increase in tolerance (more alcohol is needed to achieve the same effect)

- can't "stay stopped" – drinking has become compulsive. The person can stop drinking only for a certain period of time – perhaps up to several months.
- withdrawal symptoms (not as pronounced as adult withdrawal symptoms)

## **Facts about Alcohol**

**Alcohol is a drug, a powerful drug.**

**Alcohol kills more teens than all of the illegal drugs combined, and so is the "worst drug of all for teens."**

**Children who start drinking before the age of 15 are five times more likely to have alcohol-related problems later in life.**

**If alcohol were to come on the market today, it would be classified as a narcotic.**

**Unfortunately, in Georgia today, many children begin to experiment with alcohol when they are in elementary and middle school.**

**The average age of Georgia youth when they first try alcohol is 13 years old.**

**Your teenager was probably offered alcohol while he or she was still in elementary or middle school, so the chances are much greater for this kind of peer pressure to occur in high school.**

**Alcohol abuse has been shown to affect brain development in teenagers, affecting memory and learning.**

**Alcoholism tends to run in families; if your teen has a parent, sibling, or grandparent who is alcoholic or drug-addicted, the chances are 4 times greater that he or she could become an alcoholic.**

**One out of every 15 Americans has a significant problem with alcohol. Each of these people was once your child's age.**

**When teens drink, they typically drink to get drunk (binge drinking).**

There is still time to act and set a foundation with your teenager by talking with them about alcohol and what your expectations are.

## **What do the Statistics Say?**

But know that you are not alone. According to the latest Georgia Student Health Survey (GSHSii) **the following percentages all increase during middle and high school. It is particularly disturbing that 71 % of 12<sup>th</sup> graders say alcohol is easy to get!**

- **55% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders think alcohol is easy to get.**
- **62% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders think alcohol is easy to get.**
- **67% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders think alcohol is easy to get.**
- **71% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders think alcohol is easy to get.**
  
- **15% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders drank alcohol in the last 30 days.**
- **20% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders drank alcohol in the last 30 days.**
- **23% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders drank alcohol in the last 30 days.**
- **28% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders drank alcohol in the last 30 days.**
  
- **18% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders don't think alcohol is harmful.**
- **20% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders don't think alcohol is harmful.**
- **22% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders don't think alcohol is harmful.**
- **22% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders don't think alcohol is harmful.**

The younger youth begin to use alcohol, the more likely it is that they will experience alcohol abuse or alcoholism later on in life.

The table below, “**Risk Factors of Drinking**” points out what is at stake. These are the facts based on what happens and what could happen to youth after they start drinking and continue to drink. Remember again that alcohol kills more teens than all other drugs combined.

<b>Risk Factors of Drinking</b>
<b>Drinking at a young age can . . .</b>
Increase chances of alcohol abuse and alcoholism later on in life
Lead to experimentation with other drugs - 16% of Seniors in Georgia smoked marijuana just in the last 30 days
Delay development of social skills (how to handle difficult situations)
Lead to academic failure and dropping out of school
Damage development of portions of the brain, specifically the hippocampus, and so can decrease brain function, especially memory
Lead to criminal charges/car crashes/ legal fees
Lead to increased anger and opposition toward parents and increased strain on the family unit
Lead to injury and even death

## **2: A Look at Your Family History**

***If you have or think you may have a family history of alcoholism or addiction going back to your child's grandparents, then please read Section 2 carefully. If not, please skip to Section 3.***

There is a lot of information out there and if you start asking your friends, you'll get different answers from everyone. Many of your friends may not have the answers that you really need for your teenager.

This section can help you understand the importance of biology and family history when talking with your teenager about the risks of their drinking alcohol. Multi-generational, adoption, and twins research from the last several decades all paint a clear picture of the role our biology plays with regard to alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

### **Seeing Alcoholism as an Illness**

Let's first take a look at heart disease. Heart disease is a lifestyle-related health problem that affects many Americans. Most of us know that heart-related diseases can run in our families. Having that family history is part of what determines our biological risk for heart disease. However, it's the choices we make along with the biological risk that equal our total risk or likelihood of developing heart disease.

If we know that heart disease is a biological risk for us based on our family history, but we choose to exercise, to not smoke, to eat five servings of fruits and vegetables daily, to eat baked food, etc.... then we are making low-risk choices. By making these low-risk choices, we can lower our risk for heart disease. But if instead we live a stressful life, eat fatty foods, smoke, etc.... then our high-risk choices increase our overall risk of developing heart disease. It's not our biological risk alone that causes the onset of heart disease.

Take this same example and apply it to alcoholism. Many of us know that alcoholism runs in families, and it could be in your family history. If so, then your teen's biological risk is greater than someone who doesn't have a family history of alcoholism.

### **Choices are the Key Ingredient**

This doesn't mean that your teen is guaranteed to become an alcoholic. It's their biological risk plus their choices that equal their overall risk. And their choices are affected by their social influences (parents' attitudes, beliefs, values, and behavior regarding alcohol, their friends' attitudes, and the types of situations they are faced with in their neighborhoods).

All of the above combined feed in to the choices that your teenager makes about alcohol. If they choose to continue to drink while also being at biological risk, then their overall risk for developing alcoholism in later years increases dramatically.

Everyone has the capability of developing a dependency on alcohol if they make enough unwise choices about drinking. You can't change your child's biology, but you can help to change the choices that your teen makes about drinking. We can be effective in helping our teenagers not to drink through how we talk with them and what we say to them. This manual will help you to do that.

We get our children vaccinated in order to protect them; we watch what they eat to help avoid diabetes; we make them play outside when they're young to exercise. Alcohol abuse is preventable. Alcoholism is a 100% avoidable disease that can be prevented.

Talk with your teen and talk with them often.

If you know your teenager is drinking, and you notice changes in their behavior or negative consequences linked to drinking, then please seek counseling for them immediately. Please see the section on **Getting Help for your Teenager – Where to Go** for more information.

### **3: Dealing with Denial**

Denial can affect all of us. As a parent struggling to make sense out of the choices your teenager is making or as a teen trying to understand why your parent is making such a big deal about drinking, denying that there might be a problem can be appealing and feel safer, at least for a while. Denial can be an attempt to cope with stress, and in other situations it can serve us well.

During these times in our lives that we aren't ready either mentally or physically to handle certain situations, we sometimes protect ourselves by either denying what is happening or the emotions caused by what is happening until we're ready to face them. Let's take a look at denial from the perspectives of a parent and then of a teenager.

#### **Denial of a Parent**

You've discovered that your teen has tried alcohol and/or is drinking. Some feelings that you might be experiencing are disappointment, distress, worry, shame, etc....You're not alone in those feelings, but it's what you do with them that makes the difference for you and your teenager.

Sometimes we all want to retreat into denial and tell ourselves that

- this must be a one-time incident, or
- maybe that wasn't alcohol that I smelled, or

- perhaps it was his/her friend that was drinking.

Hats off to you as a parent because you're reading this manual and that means that you're ready to explore your options and seek help if needed for your teenager. If you are just coming out of a state of denial; don't beat yourself up because it's a self-preservation mechanism, and we all retreat from time to time.

## **Denial of a Teenager**

In this situation denial can be quite different in that the teenager is denying drinking in order to avoid getting into trouble, or talking about other issues, avoiding even the remote possibility that their drinking is not a good thing to do. Remember that your teenager is probably having some of the same feelings that you are (disappointment, worry, shame, etc....)

For them, drinking is probably fun at this point because they like the way it makes them feel. Up until now they haven't experienced any real negative consequences for their drinking except, perhaps, for your confronting their behavior.

Denial is not only used to protect the individual but also to protect the alcohol. Denial will help them justify their drinking, understate their drinking, or just completely deny that there is any problem at all and that it must be their parent's imagination.

Don't worry because you're not alone here either. Every parent has wondered at some time or another if they are blowing the issue out of proportion.

Now that denial has been identified, let's deal with it and work through it. Here are some steps to overcoming and moving past this self-preservation roadblock.

### **Steps to Overcoming Denial:**

(1) **Proper Education:** Educate yourself and your teenager about the risks associated with drinking alcohol. What are the consequences of drinking under the age of 21, not just legal but physical? What is alcoholism? What does it look like and how does it affect people and families?

(2) **Accepting Help from Others:** For parents this means looking to the experts for help. For teenagers this means letting parents in so that they can seek help for their teen.

(3) **Commitment and Active Participation:** Getting involved is the only way to overcome denial completely. For parents this means following through with whatever plan fits your situation based on your new knowledge, and, when necessary, the help of professional therapists.

For teenagers the commitment is the same. They have to be willing and ready to take a look at their drinking choices and make different decisions.

Progress is key here, not the completion of any one task. Your teenager might not be ready to admit their drinking is a problem right away, but they might stop drinking. This is still a big success and should be counted as one.

## 4: Tuning in to Your Teenager

In today's very busy world, it can be difficult to avoid coming home from work and turning on the TV to relax.

If your teenager has begun to drink, research shows that parents establishing a strong, positive relationship with their child is one of the best predictors that their teenager will avoid more serious alcohol problems in the future.

One of the most important aspects of a healthy relationship is communication. Establishing a strong pattern of communication between you and your teen will be of great value.

Teenagers as a rule are less inclined to engage in conversation with their parents, particularly if there has not been a great deal of communication earlier in their lives. So get to them now, while they are just becoming teenagers or are still in their early teenage years.

Take time to find out what is going on in your teenager's world. This helps them to feel loved and cared for. The suggestions that follow are designed to increase both the amount of communication and your teenager's desire to communicate with you.

- If your teenager does not drive or is too young to drive, you are spending a lot of time in the car and this is the perfect setting for starting to build communication. Turn off the radio or the DVD player or iPod and just chat.
- Get involved with some activities that are of interest to your teenager such as washing or working on their car, going fishing, or going shopping.
- Visit their room and show some interest in what music they are listening to or projects they are working on.

- Invite them to accompany you to the movies or to visit family. Don't be shocked when they turn you down because they would rather text on the phone or visit friends. Keep asking because you just might be surprised when they do decide to go.

You cannot make your teenager stop drinking, but you can use your power as a parent to nourish the will, the skills, and the strength in your teen to choose to stop drinking.

### **A Checklist for Tuning in to Your Teenager**

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you praise your teenager at least once a day for a quality of theirs, one of their accomplishments or for trying hard, even if they failed in the attempt?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you spend time each day talking with (not just to) your teenager?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you regularly have meals together as a family? (Shown to help prevent alcohol use)

\_\_\_\_\_ Can you discover more about what your teenager's favorite interests and hobbies are? (Even if it's something that holds no interest for you personally?)

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you know who your teen's friends are and what they like about those friends? (Also very important to know or get to know their friends' parents.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you know where your teenager spends their free time (in the afternoons after school or the weekends) and what they are doing?

## **5: Guiding and Monitoring Your Teenager – Being a Parent, not a Pal**

### **Guiding Your Teenager**

You are concerned that your teenager is drinking or you have discovered that they have tried alcohol without your knowledge; now what?

When it comes to guidance about alcohol for a teen in high school or ages 14 - 18 your guidance should be simple and straight to the point. For example, you could say the following:

***“Never drink alcohol until you are 21 years old.”***

However, if there is alcoholism somewhere in your family going back a couple of generations, they are at much higher risk to develop alcoholism themselves.

**In this case it is much safer for them never to drink.**

You often hear arguments about how taking a sip of Daddy’s beer or a sip of Mommy’s wine can actually be a good thing for children. However, research from European countries where drinking is permitted at an earlier age shows higher rates of alcohol abuse and alcoholism among teenagers.

Also, such practices give inconsistent and confusing messages to the teen which, if put into words, sound like this:

*It’s OK to drink small amounts of alcohol in certain forms (beer and wine) sometimes in certain places when given to you by certain people.*

A message like the above is confusing for many adults, let alone a teenager. What is much easier for a teenager to understand is this simple message:

***“You are not to drink alcohol.”***

**“Guidance”** means communicating your expectations and rules.

**“Expectations”** are broad standards of behavior you expect from your teenager, for example, making good decisions. Many times teenagers will do what you expect them to – your positive expectations often lead to positive behaviors and vice versa.

**“Rules”** are more specific and bring expectations to life, for example, *you are to come home on the bus from school each day unless you have my permission to do differently.*

**Certain expectations and rules that concern alcohol will help your teenager remain alcohol-free:**

- Having the expectation they won’t drink.
- Having the expectation they will be able to refuse when offered alcohol. (Remember – many, many children are offered alcohol when they are in elementary school and your child is already in high school).

- Having a rule that they can't hang out with kids who drink or have friends who drink.  
(Kids who hang out with kids who drink often end up drinking themselves).

**Other helpful rules that contribute to a teenager staying alcohol-free are:**

- Rules about when they must be back home.
- Rules about letting you know where they are going when they leave the house and how long they will be gone.
- Rules about unsupervised time.
- Rules about Internet use such as blocking alcohol-related sites and monitoring Social Networking sites; having the computer in a public place within the home.
- Rules about watching TV (how much and what), blocking adult channels.
- Rules about cell phone use, video games, music they listen to, movies they watch, etc.

Once rules are established, consequences that will occur if the teenager breaks the rule need to be communicated in advance. This is especially true of the rule about not drinking.

**One of the best predictors of a teenager not abusing alcohol is when a parent takes alcohol and drinking very seriously.** This way, attention can be given to the behavior rather than arguing with your teen about the consequence for the behavior.

Teenagers may give you a hard time about establishing limits and enforcing consequences, but research shows that a teen feels much safer when they know they have certain boundaries that cannot be crossed without consequences. When discipline is done correctly and consistently, the teen actually feels safer, more loved, and more cared for.

Understandably, many parents want to be their teenager's buddy, their pal. However, this is not in the best interests of the teen. A parent needs to be a parent. You need to love your child enough to be willing to risk their being angry with you and at times even saying that they hate you.

The healthy part of the teenager inside knows that you love them when you are setting limits and consequences, no matter what they may tell you at the time.

Teenagers have much more respect for parents who are parents rather than parents who are pals. Don't be afraid to be a strong parent.

But **do** remember to respect your teen. Never say, "You are a bad child," but rather single out the behavior they have performed and say what you don't like about what they have done or said rather than who they are. This lets the teenager know that it is the behavior that is bad, **and that he or she is still a good child.**

## Monitoring Your Teenager

"Monitoring" means keeping tabs on your teenager. It means knowing

- Who they are with
- Where they are
- What they are doing
- When they will be home

Monitoring involves:

- Asking questions about your teen's activities and whereabouts, but not interrogating your teenager.
- Having your teenager check in with you regularly
- Checking up on them
- Watching for changes in their behavior
- Talking to parents of your teenager's friends
- Checking your medicine cabinet to ensure that no medications containing alcohol are accessible or missing or have less in them. NyQuil for ages 12+ contains 10% alcohol.

If the kids are visiting their grandparents, know that Geritol contains 12% alcohol.

By comparison, beer averages around 5% alcohol and wine about 12%.

- If you keep alcohol at home, ensure it is not accessible. Check for missing bottles or cans and for lower levels in bottles.

## **Alcohol Testing - Giving Your Teenager the Power to Say “No”**

If you were standing over your child’s shoulder every time alcohol was offered to them, it’d be pretty easy for them to resist. But of course you can’t be.

But just imagine how much easier it will be for them if they can say, “I can’t do that – my parents test me for alcohol.”

This way your teen can put all the “blame” on you if they want, and not have to face the pressure and ridicule they would get for just saying “No” on their own.

That’s what alcohol testing can do for your teenager; what **you** can do for them. It gives them the gift of your support and protection right when they **need** it most.

And it can be easily and inexpensively done at home, through the use of a saliva strip. The best times can be when your child returns home from a party or from staying overnight with a friend.

**For more information on alcohol and other drug testing, please visit the website of The Council on Alcohol and Drugs, [www.livedrugfree.org](http://www.livedrugfree.org) and select the Drug Free Families link on the left.**

## **6: Respecting your Teenager**

With all this talk about monitoring, it is important to emphasize having respect for your teenager at the same time. While it appears that being overly permissive leads to more problems among teenagers than other parenting styles, you also want to be careful not to be too strict, too authoritarian. Some authors refer to this as a balance between “love” and “will.”

A healthy self-esteem is probably one of the most wonderful traits you can encourage in your teenager. If you hold your teen in high esteem, this will help your teenager to hold themselves in high esteem.

This does not mean being their buddy or catering to their every desire. But it does mean realizing that they are their own little person, a different person from you, and as such deserve a certain amount of your respect.

Respect means

- Taking time to listen to their fears and concerns.

- Making eye contact when you talk with them or listen to them.
- Talking **with** them as well as **to** them.
- Praising your teenager for at least one thing every day.  
(Many of us discipline our teenagers often but seldom praise them.)
- Treating them fairly.
- When they have done something wrong, focus on their behavior, and not on them as a “bad kid.”
- Never call them names.

Teenagers who are treated with respect suffer less from depression and other problems.

A teen without self-respect is more vulnerable to alcohol use. Teenagers who feel “down” about themselves are more likely to want to drink or get “high.”

## 7: Dealing with Your Anger and Your Teen’s Anger

Getting angry is a very human emotion, and there is nothing bad about feeling angry per se. Naturally you will be angry after finding out about your teenager’s alcohol use, perhaps very angry.

**Don’t be afraid to be a strong parent.** The advice below will help you to manage the expression of that anger with your teen.

Anger has been around since human emotions began, and it has caused conflict and turmoil through the ages. Anger is an honest emotion, but we often rely on it too much because it’s easy to express. Anger is also used because we struggle with how to express more complex, underlying feelings such as fear and disappointment.

For example, take a moment to think about the last time you were angry with something or someone. You can probably explain the situation: you can describe how your body felt (heartbeat racing, skin hot to the touch, face turning red, stomach getting tight, etc...) but what was the real feeling that was overlooked?

**Usually when we are angry it is because we are afraid of something.** Anger can often be fear in disguise.

Anger can be linked to feelings of disappointment, distress, worry, and shame (the same feelings that can lead to denial). We use anger because we're not sure how to express those other feelings, and getting angry is a quick and easy way for us to deal with fear and release tension.

However, anger can lead people to act out of control and become destructive. Destructive behavior can take the form of lashing out emotionally towards others or physical violence.

When having difficult discussions with your teenager about their use of alcohol, it's almost certain that either you or your teen will express some anger. Let's take a look at anger from the perspectives of a parent and then of a teenager.

### **When Parents Get Angry**

In the previous section of this manual we discuss how to speak with your teenager about alcohol while maintaining both your teen's respect for you and your respect for your teenager. We also talk about how best to monitor your teenager in the future. But for right now we are going to take a look at how to deal with intense anger you may be feeling toward your teen as well as the anger they may be feeling toward you.

Having these feelings is a great time to learn how to manage these emotions and then model this behavior in front of your teenager. This could be especially helpful since some of the changes you may have in store for your teenager are more than likely going to cause them to feel angry.

### **Steps to Overcoming Anger for Parents**

**(1) Keep Quiet** - even if you have the urge to shout. This will keep you from saying things that hurt others or something that you'll regret later.

**(2) Remain calm** - If you're standing, then sit down, if you're sitting down then lie down for a while. If you need to leave the room or the situation to be alone, then go. This is referred to as a cooling down period.

**(3) Take a Time Out** - Cool yourself down first by having a cool drink (please - not alcohol!), splashing cold water on your face, or washing your face. Better still, take a shower.

**This will buy you some time to think things over, calm down and evaluate the situation. It will help you to think more clearly about how to deal with the situation at hand.**

**(4) Speak strongly but calmly** - When you're ready to confront the issue, then speak with authority but in a calm voice. A strong but calm voice tends to calm others down and gets others to respond to you. **Be brief, be firm, be calm (The 3 B's).**

**(5) Think carefully before expressing your anger** - Make this a conscious decision. Will anger help the situation or help get a point across to your teenager? If a raised voice helps get your teen's attention, then use it. But if it only causes them to tune you out, then it's not effective.

## **When Teenagers Get Angry**

Anger in a teenager can manifest itself in so many different ways. As a parent it's important to monitor this behavior and look for the signs that your teen sends out. You know your teenager better than anyone, so just keep your eyes open because these behaviors, if not addressed, could become disruptive for your teenager.

Below are just some of the ways in which teenagers express anger.

- Episodes of rage which can involve yelling and/or hitting people or objects
- Pouting and withdrawing from family and friends (locking themselves away in their room)
- Acting out
- Crying

## **Dealing with Your Teenager's Anger**

You need to love your teenager enough to be willing to risk their getting angry with you, perhaps even hating you. But there is no reason you should be their "whipping post." Again, **don't be afraid to be a strong parent.**

If your teen becomes inappropriately angry with you, let them know that their behavior is not acceptable. If it continues, give them appropriate consequences for expressing their anger inappropriately. **Sometimes a consequence is worth a thousand words.** Be sure to follow through with the consequences. If there are two parents in the household, make sure the teenager does not try to "split" the two of you by appealing to the "softer parent."

## **Steps for Dealing with Your Teenager's Anger when it becomes Disrespectful**

(1) **Tell them to keep quiet for a certain period of time** - even if they have the urge to shout.

(2) **Tell them to remain calm** - If they are standing ask them to sit down, if they are sitting ask them to lie down for a while.

(3) **Tell them to cool down** - Help them to cool down first by offering them a drink, or recommend that they splash cold water on their face, or better still they could take a shower to cool down.

(4) **Tell them to take a “Time Out”** – Ask them to go to their room and be alone for a certain period of time to think things over.

## 8: Discussions with Your Teenager

### Have It Right Away!

You have discovered that your teenager has been drinking alcohol and now you need to talk with them about your discovery and your concerns.

You are probably nervous and a little unsure of what to say. Please take the time to prepare and let the following information help you. It's very important to have the conversation as soon as possible, as your teenager might suspect that you know – waiting longer to talk minimizes the seriousness of the situation in their minds.

### Stick to the Facts

It's very important to know the facts about alcohol and not to exaggerate the dangers. There are plenty of dangers without having to exaggerate them. Watching “The Worst Drug of All” video (available at [www.StopAlcoholUnder21.org](http://www.StopAlcoholUnder21.org)) before having this discussion will give you the facts you need to begin talking.

If you can't answer all your teenager's questions about alcohol, just admit it. Look for answers elsewhere on this website and get back to them. If you are reading the printed version of this manual, please go to the **Resource Links** and **Additional Resources** sections at [www.StopAlcoholUnder21.org](http://www.StopAlcoholUnder21.org) for more information.

Get your teenager's agreement that if anyone ever offers them alcohol again in the future, they will come to you and tell you about it. Also have your teen agree that if anyone ever offers them something to drink, but won't tell them what it is, that they will come to you and tell you about that, too.

### When and Where to Have the Discussion

Make sure the discussion occurs at a time and place where there are no distractions so you and your teenager can focus solely on the topic at hand. For example, please be sure that both of your cell phones and the TV are off.

Stay calm and do not react with fear or with anger toward anything your teen might say or not say.

## **Good Listening is an Art**

Here are some of the things involved in being a good listener:

(1) There is a lot to being a good listener. Make sure you take in everything your teenager is saying. Be patient and go slowly. Make sure you give your teen plenty of time to say what they have to say before jumping in.

(2) Sometimes an open mind and an open ear are the best things you can bring to a conversation with your teenager.

(3) Repeat back to your teenager in your own words what they told you to make sure you understood them correctly.

(4) Ask follow-up questions that take more than a “yes” or “no” response from your teenager to be answered.

## **Be Prepared for Your Teenager to Deny Their Drinking**

When you start having this discussion with your teenager, chances are that they will start feeling very uncomfortable due to guilt, fear of the consequences, etc...

Be prepared for them to offer “creative alternatives” to the truth.

- “Someone put that in my locker -- it’s not mine!”
- “I was only holding that for a friend.”
- “I didn’t know that had alcohol in it.”

**If this happens, remember that you are the parent and although it would be easier to accept those explanations, you know it’s extremely doubtful that they are telling the truth.**

## **If Your Teenager Admits to Drinking**

(1) Your teenager says that they accepted an offer and drank or they took alcohol from somewhere and drank it. Again, stay calm and don’t react with fear or with anger toward your teen.

(2) Try to verify how much they drank and what effect it had on them. Also try to verify what it was they drank (for example cough syrup with alcohol in it, beer, wine, an alcohol-energy drink, etc.) Ask where the alcohol came from (for example from a friend, an older acquaintance, or from home).

(3) If you think this is the first time your teenager has drunk, do not discipline them unless you had already established a consequence for drinking beforehand. In other words, don't punish the teen for being honest with you.

(4) However be very clear about specific and definite consequences should this occur again in the future.

(5) If the alcohol was offered from a friend, it would be good to take the next step and let the friend's mother or father know what has happened. You probably want to ask them to keep your name and your teenager's name out of it if possible to avoid possible retaliation against your teen.

If the alcohol came from someone over the age of 17, then you might want to consider calling the police and filing charges. If the source was your home, then we advise you to lock your alcohol up and keep an inventory.

## **9: Getting Help for Your Teenager – Where to Go**

If you think your teenager's alcohol problem is serious enough, use the phone numbers below to get an evaluation from someone in your area for your teen in regard to their alcohol use. You can also go to the **Resource Links** or the **Additional Resources** tabs at [StopAlcoholUnder21.org](http://StopAlcoholUnder21.org) for more information.

When looking for someone to evaluate your teenager, be sure to ask the clinician if they have experience in the field of substance abuse. This will help to ensure that you receive the best assessment and care for your teen.

### **Helpline Georgia for Substance Abuse**

1-800-338-6745

Website: [www.hodac.org](http://www.hodac.org)

### **Georgia Addiction Counselors' Association**

770.434.1000

### **The Council on Alcohol and Drugs**

Website: [www.livedrugfree.org](http://www.livedrugfree.org)

**Drug Free Families link**

404) 223-2483

**United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta** (in metro Atlanta only)

Call 211

**National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)**

5635 Fishers Lane, MSC 9304

Bethesda, MD 20892-9304

Website: [www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)

**The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)**

P.O. Box 2345

Rockville, MD 20847-2345

1-800-729-6686

Website: <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>

**If you think your teen may be alcoholic:****Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.)**

**Ask for information about Young People's Meetings**

**Website: [aageorgia.org](http://aageorgia.org)**

**Go to "Find A Meeting" on the AA Website to find local phone numbers to call for more information about Young People's Meetings**

## **10: Being a Good Role Model for Your Teenager**

A very famous man once said, "The three best ways children learn are by example, by example, and by example."

Probably nothing is going to influence your teen as much as what you do or don't do. Your actions communicate a great deal to your teenager.

This can be a little confusing for your teenager if you happen to drink yourself, since you can legally drink and your teen cannot.

If you drink, you will need to clearly explain to your teenager about why drinking is illegal for persons under 21 years old and legal for people 21 years old and older – because most adults, like yourself, have the ability to drink without harming themselves or others.

When it comes to alcohol, don't just "talk the talk," but "walk the walk." In this case "walking the walk" means making certain you

- Never provide alcohol to your teenager.
- Never abuse alcohol yourself, particularly in front of your teen.
- Never provide alcohol to anyone under 21, particularly in front of your teenager.
- Never drink and drive – remember, even one drink can impair your driving, even if you are still below the legal BAC (blood alcohol concentration) limit.
- Deliver a clear and consistent message – no drinking.
- If you have a spouse or other adults in the household, secure their cooperation in serving as positive role models as well.

Parents who set a good example in this area when their children are young are much more likely to have teenagers who will also do better when it comes to alcohol, both now and in the future.

Even though you know or suspect that your teenager is already drinking, it's not too late to model these behaviors. Your teen is going to look to you for answers and for a firm and unwavering stance on how you feel about their drinking.

By helping to surround your teenager with such things as increased parental monitoring, regular dinners together as a family, and positive school interactions, then you as the parent start building the wall of protection for your teen. This in turn helps protect them from future drinking.

Here are a couple of general role modeling tips from Dr. Robyn Silverman, a teenager development specialist, success coach, and parenting expert:

(1) **Model positive choice-making:** Little eyes are watching and little ears are listening. (This doesn't change with age, as your children grow they are still watching and listening and looking to you for answers.) When it comes to being a role model, you must be aware that the choices you make impact not only you, but also your teenager.

(2) **Think out loud:** When you have a tough choice to make, allow your teenager to hear how you work through the problem, weigh the pros and cons, and come to a decision. It's important to teach the skills of getting to and making a good decision.

### **A Checklist for Being a Good Role Model**

\_\_\_\_\_ Having family gatherings and parties that don't include alcohol. It's important to show your teenager that you can have fun whether or not alcohol is served.

\_\_\_\_\_ Not sharing "funny" stories or "war" stories about your or others' past drinking in front of your teen. (Getting drunk is like a drug overdose.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Not using alcohol to cope with problems or discomforts.

\_\_\_\_\_ Getting help for a family member or yourself if you think you or they may have a problem with alcohol. Discussing alcohol abuse and alcoholism openly and the problems it has caused your loved one with your teenager.

## **11: Parent Checklist**

Congratulations to you as a parent for taking the time to read this manual and for trying to protect your teenager from the dangers of alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

We've given you a lot of information, and as with most parents, you might be feeling a little overwhelmed or wondering how to fit all this into your busy schedule. Here are some easy steps you can take with your teenager each day, week, and month to help stay connected.

### **To Do Daily**

\_\_\_\_\_ Know your teenager's main activities and plans for the day.

\_\_\_\_\_ Know your teenager's whereabouts when you can't be with them and know who they are likely to be with.

\_\_\_\_\_ If appropriate for that day, remind your teen about relevant rules.

\_\_\_\_\_ At the end of each day, ask your teen how their day went.

\_\_\_\_\_ Praise and thank your teen for good behavior such as staying alcohol-free and working hard in school.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check that homework and other responsibilities have been completed.

\_\_\_\_\_ Try to have family meals together or engage in another family activity on a regular basis.

### **To Do Weekly**

\_\_\_\_\_ Take some time to check in with your teenager. Set 20 minutes aside to find out

how friendships are going, what's happening at school and what other events are important in your teen's life.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check up on your teenager if they are playing outside the home or at a friend's house. Check with the parents to see that everything is going well. Make sure those parents understand your rules about no alcohol.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask your teen mid-week if there are any special plans for the weekend that require your input. Do this early to avoid last-minute conflict.

\_\_\_\_\_ Every once in a while, check that your teenager is where they said they were going to be.

\_\_\_\_\_ Encourage your teen to have a friend over or engage in fun activities together.

\_\_\_\_\_ Remind your teenager about weekday/weekend rules and expectations, including those about alcohol, when appropriate.

\_\_\_\_\_ Try to schedule activities in which friends and other parents can join; invite them to your house.

## **To Do Monthly**

\_\_\_\_\_ Make sure you've had at least a couple of individual activities or outings with your teenager.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check the quality of your relationship with your teenager. Are they being open or closed with you? Does your teen seem to be avoiding you or not telling you the whole story when talking with you? Bear in mind that in later middle school years some teenagers start becoming "cool" and less open with their parents.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check in with your teenager to see what has taken up his or her time and interest this month, and discuss it. Ask if there's anything you can do to help.

\_\_\_\_\_ Make sure you've followed through on any recent promises to your teen.

\_\_\_\_\_ Plan one special family event or activity. Try to do things that your teenager enjoys, which may be different from things you particularly enjoy.

\_\_\_\_\_ Talk with your teenager's teacher on your teen's school progress. Check in with coaches or a guidance counselor about extracurricular activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Find out who your teenager has been spending time with. What have they been doing? Follow up on any red flags or concerns.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check on what your teen has been spending their money on.

\_\_\_\_\_ Stay up-to-date on news and trends among teenagers in the area. Talk with other parents and discuss concerns with your kids. Check with local youth organizations to find out about problems in your community.

\_\_\_\_\_ Attend a PTA Meeting. Volunteer for the PTA to find out more about what is happening at your teenager’s school.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask your teen if they’ve been offered alcohol or been exposed to others drinking and talk about how they handled it and how it made them feel

\_\_\_\_\_ Check in with your teenager about rules. If they’ve been doing well, then be flexible and reward them in meaningful ways. When your teens are ready, allow them more freedoms. Discuss any new rules or limits for new activities.

## 12: Parent Network

Here is a place to keep names, phone numbers and emails of parents of your teenager’s friends, your teenager’s teachers, principal, and coach. You can also list the email addresses and phone numbers associated with your local PTA and other community organizations. These are good pages to print or tear out and keep handy, maybe on the fridge. *(See next two pages).*

<b>My Parent Network</b>	
Parents of Friends	
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone

<b>Friends of Teenager</b>	
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone
Name	Cell Phone
Email	Home Phone
<b>Teachers</b>	
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2
<b>Principal</b>	
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2
<b>Coach</b>	
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2
<b>Community Organizations</b>	
Name	Phone 1

Email	Phone 2
Neighbors & Others	
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2

## **Appendix 1- Warning Signs of Alcohol Use**

Teens who are experiencing a problem with alcohol will exhibit a number of similar warning signs. However, it's not always easy to tell when children and teens are using alcohol or other drugs.

For this reason, it's good to keep the lines of communication open with your teenager as well as stay aware of what they are doing and who their friends are. This will help distinguish between normal behavior and a possible alcohol issue.

While there is no single warning sign for alcohol use, some signs to look for include **noticing your teenager doing or having the following:**

- 1. Smell of alcohol on their breath**
- 2. Acting drunk**
- 3. Slurred speech**
- 4. Lack of coordination**
- 5. Vomiting**
- 6. Hangovers**
- 7. Listening to a greater than usual amount of alcohol-related music along with collecting key chains, belt buckles, bottle openers, t-shirts, bags, etc. with alcohol- related logos and messages on them.**
- 8. Bottles or cans (empty or full) found in their room, locker, car, or elsewhere. (When these items are found, teenagers will often say they belong to someone else or they are just holding it for someone else.)**
- 9. Spending more time with peers that are known to drink alcohol or changing who they hang out with all together.**

If you witness the warning signs above and believe your teenager may have an issue with alcohol, be sure to get professional help as soon as possible. Please see the Getting Help section of each version of the Early Intervention Parenting Manual for more information.

For some teens, alcohol use can turn into alcoholism. So they need to get help quickly before it turns into a much bigger problem.