

# Keeping Your Child Alcohol-Free



## An Early Intervention\* Manual For Parents with Children in Middle School\*

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



Governor's Office for  
Children and Families





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Appendix 1- Warning Signs of Alcohol Use

# 1: Understanding the Risks

Your reading this Early Intervention Manual means that you have made a difficult discovery, the discovery that your child has been drinking alcohol. You might still have some doubts or be second guessing what you have discovered. Take a moment to review the Warning Signs of Alcohol Use in Appendix 1 or see the Warning Signs posted in the Parent Manuals section of the [www.StopAlcoholUnder21.org](http://www.StopAlcoholUnder21.org) website.

However, you are to be congratulated for not burying your head in the sand and pretending it's no big deal.

The good news is that very likely, since your child is in middle school, you have found out about the problem early on when you can have a very significant impact on your child.

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 child and avoid mistakes or exaggeration.

At this age your child is more likely to pay attention to what you say than to anyone else.

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

## **From a Big Frog in a Little Pond to a Little Frog in a Big Pond**

As your child made the transition from Elementary School to Middle School-- as is the case with most children-- it's only natural that they experienced some anxiety about going from being a big frog in a little pond to a little frog in a big pond.

Typically at this time grades and attendance go down for many youth 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.

With great patience and support of their parents, children can successfully make this transition in a healthy and safe way.

Remember that your child may have concerns about:

- 1) the new environment of the middle 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) reaching puberty and the consequences and challenges involved in having done so.
- 3) having new, stricter authority figures, rules and regulations.
- 4) having older students in the same school.
- 5) finding people to fit in with 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 middle schoolers seek out not-so-healthy ways to deal with these newfound pressures and stressors.

Alcohol is marketed in numerous , subtle and not so subtle ways in Georgia and throughout all of the U.S as a way to fit in, relieve stress and complete a rite of passage. And peer pressure takes many of its cues from that marketing.

### **Alcohol Abuse vs. Alcohol Dependence (Alcoholism):**

Let's take a minute to review alcohol abuse and alcoholism. This will help you have a clear understanding of the differences and have a better understanding of these terms.

**Alcohol Abuse** refers to a pattern of substance use leading to significant impairment in functioning. One of the following must be present within a 12 month period:

- recurrent use 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 or interpersonal problems caused by the substance use.

The symptoms do not meet the criteria for substance dependence as described below.

**Alcoholism** refers to substance use history which includes the following:

- substance abuse
  - continuation of use despite related problems
  - increase in tolerance (more of the drug is needed to achieve the same effect)
- withdrawal symptoms

## **Facts About Alcohol**

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

**Alcohol kills more kids than all of the illegal drugs combined.**

**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 school.**

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

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

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

**Alcoholism tends to run in families; if your child has a parent, sibling, or grandparent that is alcoholic or drug-addicted, the chances are greater that he/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.**

Now is exactly the right age to act and set a foundation with your child by talking with them about alcohol and what your expectations are.

Unfortunately in Georgia today, many children begin to experiment with alcohol when they are in elementary school. **And alcohol kills more kids than all the illegal drugs combined.**

But know that you are not alone. According to the latest Georgia Student Health Survey (GSHSii) **the following percentages all increase during middle school. It is particularly disturbing that 40 % of 8<sup>th</sup> graders say alcohol is easy to get!**

- **21% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders think alcohol is easy to get.**
- **40% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders think alcohol is easy to get.**
  
- **3% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders drank alcohol in the last 30 days.**
- **10% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders drank alcohol in the last 30 days.**
  
- **17% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders don't think alcohol is harmful.**
- **17.5% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders don't think alcohol is harmful.**

The younger a child begins to use alcohol, the more likely it is that that child will experience alcohol abuse or alcohol addiction (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 children 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. Almost 12% of young people, ages 12-17, are using illicit drugs
Delay development of social skills (how to handle difficult situations)
Lead to Academic Failure
Damage development of portions of the brain, specifically the hippocampus
Lead to Criminal Charges / Legal Fees
Lead to increased opposition toward parents and a 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 child.

This section can help you understand the importance of biology and family history when talking with your child 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.

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 family. 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, not to smoke, eat five servings of fruits and vegetables daily, 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 child's biological risk is greater than someone who doesn't have a family history of alcoholism.

This doesn't mean that your child 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 feeds in to the choices that your child 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 child makes about drinking. We can be effective in helping our children 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 children and talk with them often.

If you know your child 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 Child – 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 child is making or as a child 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. Denial is nothing more than a coping mechanism, and at times 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 the event or the emotions caused by that event until we're ready to face them. Let's take a look at denial from the perspectives of a parent and then of a child.

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

You've discovered that your child 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 child.

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 child. 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 Child

In this situation denial can be quite different in that the child 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 child 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 child 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 children this means letting parents in so that they can seek help for their child.**

**(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 children 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 child 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 Child

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

If your child has begun to drink, research shows that parents establishing a strong, positive relationship with their child in the early, formative years is one of the best predictors that their child 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 now between you and your child will be of great value later on.

Teenagers as a rule are less inclined to engage in conversation with their parents, particularly if there has been no basis for doing so earlier in their lives. So get to them now, while they just becoming teenagers or are still in their early teenage years.

Take time to find out what is going on in your child's world. This helps them to feel loved and cared for. I'm sure as a parent you are spending a lot of time in the car with your middle schooler and this is the perfect setting for starting to build communication. Turn off the radio or the DVD player or iPod and just chat.

You can use your power as a parent to nourish the will, the skills, and the strength in your child to choose not to drink.

### A Checklist for Tuning in to Your Child

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you praise your child 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 child?

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

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

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

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

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

### **Guiding Your Child**

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

You are the messenger your child is most likely to listen to. When it comes to guidance about alcohol for a child in middle school, guidance should be simple and straight to the point:

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

However, if there is alcoholism somewhere in your child’s 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 child which, if put into words, sounds 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 this is confusing for many adults, let alone a middle schooler. What is much easier for an middle school child to understand is the 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 child, for example, making good decisions. Many times children 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 child 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 middle 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 child 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, watching TV (how much and what), cell phone use, video games, music they listen to, movies they watch, etc.

Once rules are established, consequences that will occur if the child 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 child not abusing alcohol is when a parent takes alcohol very seriously.**

This way attention can be given to the behavior rather than arguing with your child about the consequence for the behavior.

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

Understandably many parents want to be their child's buddy, their pal. However, this is not in the best interests of the child. 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 child inside knows that you love them when you are setting limits and consequences, no matter what they may tell you at the time.

Children 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 child. 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 child know that it is the behavior that is bad, **and that he or she is still a good child.**

## **Monitoring Your Child**

"Monitoring" means keeping tabs on your children. 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 child's activities and whereabouts, but not interrogating your child.
- Having your child check in with you regularly
- Checking up on them
- Watching for changes in their behavior
- Talking to parents of your child'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.

### **Give Your Child 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 won’t be – at least, not physically.

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

This way they 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 drug testing does for your child; what **you** can do for them. It gives them the gift of your support and protection right when they **need** it most.

**For more information on Drug Screening 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 Child**

With all this talk about monitoring, it is important to emphasize having respect for your child at the same time. While it appears that being overly permissive leads to more problems among children 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 child. If you hold your child in high esteem, this will help your child 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 child for at least one thing every day.  
(Many of us discipline our children 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.

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

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

## 7: Dealing with Your Anger and Your Child’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 child’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 child.

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 anger can be linked back to feelings like fear, 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 release the 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 child about their use of alcohol, it's almost certain that either you or your child will express some anger. Let's take a look at anger from the perspectives of a parent and then of a child.

### **When Parents Get Angry**

In the previous section of this Manual we discuss how to speak with your child about alcohol while maintaining both your child's respect for you and your respect for your child. We also talk about how best to monitor your child 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 child 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 child. This could be especially helpful since some of the changes you may have in store for your child 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 lay 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 child? If a raised voice helps get

your child's attention, then use it. But if it only causes them to tune you out, then it's not effective.

## **When Children Get Angry**

Anger in a child 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 child sends out. You know your child better than anyone, so just keep your eyes open because these behaviors, if not addressed, could become disruptive for your child.

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

- Episodes of rage which can involve yelling and/or hitting people or objects
- Pouting and withdrawing from family and friends
- Acting out
- Crying

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

You need to love your child 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 child become 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 child does not try to "split" the two of you by appealing to the "softer parent."

## **Steps for Dealing with Your Child'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 Child**

### **Have It Right Away!**

You have discovered that your child 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 child 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 child’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 child’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 child 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 child can focus solely on the topic at hand. For example, please be sure your cell phone and the TV are off.

Stay calm and do not react with fear or with anger toward anything your child 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 child is saying. Be patient and go slowly. Make sure you give your child 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 child.
- (3) Repeat back to your child 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 child to be answered.

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

When you start having this discussion with your child, 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 Child Admits to Drinking**

(1) Your child 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 child.

(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 child has drunk, do not discipline them unless you had already established a consequence for drinking beforehand. In other words, don't punish the child 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 child's name out of it if possible to avoid possible retaliation against your child.

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 Child – Where to Go**

If you think your child's alcohol problem is serious enough, use the phone numbers below to get an evaluation from someone in your area for your child 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 child, 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 child.

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

1-800-338-6745

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

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

770.434.1000

**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>

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

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 child as much as what you do or don’t do. Your actions communicate a great deal to your child.

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

If you drink, you will need to clearly explain to your child 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 child.
- Never abuse alcohol yourself, particularly in front of your child.
- Never provide alcohol to anyone under 21, particularly in front of your child.
- 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 children who will also do better when it comes to alcohol, both now and in the future.

Even though you know or suspect that your child is already drinking, it's not too late to model these behaviors. Your child 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 child 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 child. This in turn helps protect them from future drinking.

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

(1) **Model positive choice-making:** Little eyes are watching and little ears are listening. When it comes to being a role model, you must be aware that the choices you make impact not only you, but also your children.

(2) **Think out loud:** When you have a tough choice to make, allow the children 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 children 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 child. (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.

## 11. Parent Checklist

Congratulations to you as a parent for taking the time to read this manual and for trying to protect your child 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 child each day, week, and month to help stay connected.

### To Do Daily

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Know your child'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 child about relevant rules.

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_ 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 child. Set 20 minutes aside to find out how friendships are going, what's happening at school and what other events are important in your child's life.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check up on your child 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 child 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 child is where they said they were going to be.

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Try to schedule play dates with friends and other parents, invite them to your house

## **To Do Monthly**

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Check the quality of your relationship with your child. Are they being open or closed with you? Does your child 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 children start becoming "cool" and less open with their parents.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check in with your child 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 child.

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

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

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Stay up-to-date on news and trends among children 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 child's school.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ask your child 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 child 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 child's friends, your child'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.

<b>My Parent Network</b>	
<b>Parents of Friends</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

Coach	
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2
Community Organizations	
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

Children and young people 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 child 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:

- 1. Noticing your child doing or having the following:**
- 2. Smell of alcohol on their breath**
- 3. Acting drunk**
- 4. Slurred speech**
- 5. Lack of coordination**
- 6. Vomiting**
- 7. Hangovers**
- 8. 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.**
- 9. Bottles or cans (empty or full) found in their room, locker, car, or elsewhere. (When these items are found, children will often say they belong to someone else or they are just holding it for someone else.)**

If you witness the warning signs above and believe your child 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 and even a few pre-teens, alcohol use can turn into alcoholism. So they need to get help quickly before it turns into a much bigger problem.