

Keeping Your Child Alcohol-Free



A Primary Prevention* Manual For Parents with Children in Middle School

**Primary Prevention means
preventing the problem before it starts.*



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 Primary Prevention Manual means that you believe that your child has not begun to drink alcohol. To be completely certain of this you can look at 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 website.

This manual will help you use the tool that has been proven to be the most effective in keeping your child alcohol-free – parental involvement.

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 stay alcohol-free, because the risks are great and 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.

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. 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 or grandparent who is alcoholic or drug-addicted, the chances are greater that he/she could become alcoholic.**
- **One in 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 to set a strong foundation with your child by talking with him or her about alcohol and what your expectations are.

According to the latest Georgia Student Health Survey (GSHSii) the following percentages all increase during middle school. It is particularly disturbing that 40 % of 8th graders say alcohol is easy to get!

- **21% of 6th graders think alcohol is easy to get.**
- **40% of 8th graders think alcohol is easy to get.**

- **3% of 6th graders drank alcohol in the last 30 days.**
- **10% of 8th graders drank alcohol in the last 30 days.**

- **17% of 6th graders don't think alcohol is harmful.**
- **17.5% of 8th graders don't think alcohol is harmful.**

If your child can stay alcohol-free until reaching age 21, the chances go way up that she/he will never have a problem with alcohol during her/his lifetime.

However, the younger a child begins to use alcohol, the more likely it is that that child will have an alcohol abuse problem or alcohol addiction (an alcoholism) later on in life.

2: Focusing on Your Child

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

But the research shows that parents' establishing a strong positive relationship with their child in the early, formative years is one of the best predictors that the child will avoid alcohol and other drug problems.

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.

This is especially true because 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.

Take time to find out what is going on in your child's world. This helps him or her to feel loved and cared for.

Use your power as a parent to nourish the will, the skills, and the strength of your child to choose not to drink.

A Checklist for Tuning into 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? (This has been shown to help prevent alcohol use.)

_____ Do you try to 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 attend PTA Meetings? Volunteer for the PTA to find out more about what is happening at your child's school.

3. Guiding and Monitoring Your Child – Being a Parent, not a Pal

Guiding Your Child

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 a 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 that they won’t drink.

- Having the expectation that they will be able to refuse when offered alcohol. (Remember – many, many children are offered alcohol when they are in middle school.)
- Having a rule that your child 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 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 point 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 the behavior may be bad, but **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 him or her
- Watching for changes in behavior
- Talking to parents of your child’s friends
- Checking your medicine cabinet to ensure 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.

4. That Magic Discussion with Your Child

Have It When Your Child is Young!

When your child is still young, the most effective prevention tool is a parent who takes alcohol use seriously (*any alcohol use*).

When parents of young children take alcohol use seriously, so will the vast majority of their children.

Since nearly all children are offered alcohol while in middle school, it is very important that you have this conversation when they are still young.

Hopefully this discussion will take place before they have accepted an offer to drink and did so.

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. Watching "The Worst Drug of All" video (also available at www.StopAlcoholUnder21.org) prior to 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. Go to the **Resource Links** and **Additional Resources** sections for more information.

Get your child's agreement that, if anyone ever offers them alcohol, 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 your child what it is, that your child 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 he/she has 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.

What to do if You Discover Your Child Has Already Been Offered Alcohol

If you discover that your child has already been offered alcohol or has even drunk alcohol, do not turn this magic discussion into a confrontation or a fight.

This discovery may occur in two ways:

a) During the above discussion you discover that your child has been offered alcohol in the past.

b) There is a “magic moment” when your child comes to you saying something like, “Mommy, Barbara offered me some cough syrup with alcohol in it today.”

This is called a “magic moment” because it may not happen again. The magic moment provides you, as a parent, with a golden opportunity to talk with your child about alcohol.

In either case it’s very important that you realize there are two possibilities you should be aware of before starting the discussion:

(a) Your child refused the offer and did not drink.

(b) Your child accepted the offer and did drink.

Possibility (a) – Your child refused

(1) If your child says they refused the offer, take that opportunity to praise them highly. Making eye contact with them say very clearly with much pride in your voice that your child has done a great thing – and they have! They have said “No” to peer pressure!

(2) It would be good to take the next step and let “Barbara’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.

(3) Give the child some reward for having refused.

Possibility (b) – Your child accepted

(1) If your child says that they accepted the offer and drank, 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 (cough syrup with alcohol in it, beer, wine, an alcohol-energy drink, etc.)

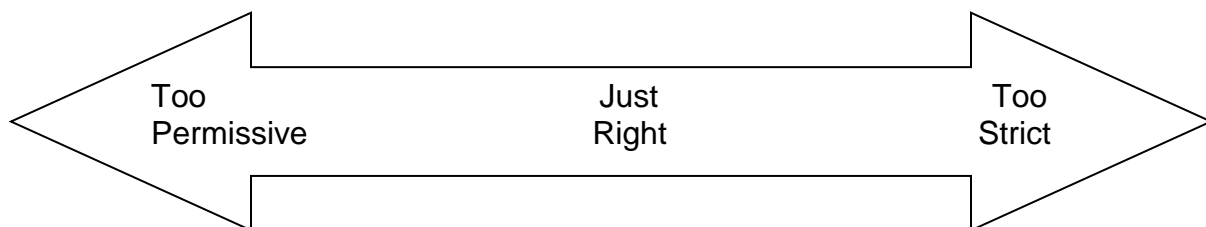
(3) If you think this is the first time your child has drunk, do not discipline them unless you had already established a consequence for drinking beforehand. In other words, don’t punish the child for being honest with you.

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

(5) It would be good to take the next step and let “Barbara’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.

5. 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 your child's buddy or catering to their every desire. But it does mean realizing that your child is their own little person, a different person from you, and as such deserves a certain amount of your respect.

Respect means

- Taking time to listen to their fears and concerns
- Making eye contact when you talk with 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, focusing on the behavior, and not on them as a "bad kid"
- Never calling 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."

6. 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).
- 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.

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.

7. 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.

We've given you a lot of information and, as would 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.

To Do Monthly

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

_____ Check the temperature of your relationship. How are things going?

_____ 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.

8. My 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.

My Parent Network	
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

Teachers	
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2
Name	Phone 1
Email	Phone 2
Principal	
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.