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Information your teenagers need about drink driving

Okay they don’t talk to strangers, they look before they cross the road and they know about safe sex.

Now your teenagers need to know about drink driving.

Peer Group Pressure

Peer group pressure is very strong among teenagers. The need to be part of a group and accepted by their peers often means that teenagers will go along with things they don’t necessarily agree with rather than stand out from the group.

Many social situations make it more likely that young people will drink before driving or accept a lift from a person who has been drinking. For example, in a car full of young people it is hard for young drivers to resist the temptation to show off to their friends. At these times it is also common for them not to wear seatbelts.

However, it is important that your teenager understands that they are solely responsible for their own actions. It can be easy to say “they made me do it” (drive too fast, drive after drinking, etc). In such cases it might be useful to ask your teenager “Why do you give other people so much power (or control) over your life?” and “Who would the police charge if there was a crash?”

Going against the wishes of the group is very difficult at first, but can become easier with practice. By discussing these situations with your teenager you can help them prepare for the time when they will need the confidence to say “no”.

Some strategies for your teenager

When they are confronted with a potential drink-driving situation, suggest that they:

- Give a simple explanation about why they refuse to go with the crowd and be honest about what they think and feel
- Be polite, but firm, when saying “no”
- Show that they are in control of their own actions and decisions and are committed to their decision
- Suggest some of the possible consequences of going through with whatever the planned action is. By taking charge of their own actions or acting responsibly they can avoid being seen as afraid and being rejected by the group
- Be prepared to say that they don’t like to be pressured into doing things they know are not right.

Consequences

Teenagers don’t always think about the long-term consequences of their actions. Talk to them about some of the outcomes of unsafe driving including drink driving and how this could affect their lives forever:

- Personal consequences
  - Being responsible for killing or seriously injuring someone; either themselves or someone else including a friend or family member
  - Losing people’s respect
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- Financial consequences
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Summary

The single most important thing you can do is keep a two-way communication channel open with your teenager so you can feel confident that they will come to you if they need your help. They will then feel equally confident that you will help them out (without fear of reprisal or condemnation) if they find themselves in a difficult situation.

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Around 9,000 young people aged between 15 and 24 are killed or seriously injured in road crashes each year. Alcohol is a factor in around a third of these deaths and is certainly also a factor in crashes causing serious injuries.

Teenagers learning to drive are generally at the age when they try alcohol for the first time. Although your teenager may be a good driver, alcohol will affect their ability to drive safely. This brochure aims to give you helpful ideas on how to talk to your teenager about the responsibilities that go with being a driver, and particularly about drinking and driving. Make sure they understand that their first priority should always be the safety of themselves and their passengers.

Legal blood alcohol limits for young drivers

You should know, and remind your teenager, that learner drivers and provisional licence holders are subject to a zero blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit. This means that drinking any alcohol at all will put them over the legal limit to drive.

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By amicably agreeing to a set of reasonable guidelines you are demonstrating a level of confidence in your teenager and acknowledging a level of maturity which goes with the responsibility of them borrowing your car or having a car of their own. You should not set guidelines that you would not be prepared to follow yourself.

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Leaving it until your teenager is heading out the door with keys in hand is not the best time to get their attention.

You probably know your teenager better than anyone and will know instinctively when it is time to start talking about drink driving. You will know the time is right when your teenager:

- starts going to places where alcohol is probably available
- has started drinking alcohol
- goes out in friends’ cars
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Alcohol

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Alcohol will:

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