

Be a Good Role Model

Perhaps the most important thing parents can do for their children, from the time they are very young, is to be good role models.

Children are keen observers. They know a lot more about you than you may think, so your drinking behavior and attitudes are being communicated to them. The example you set will have great influence on your kids. It's a fact of life that what you do is just as important as what you say.

If you drink, make it a normal part of your life, as most adults do. Don't overdo it or place too much emphasis on drinking.

The majority of adults who drink do so responsibly ... to enhance a meal, to share good times with friends, or to celebrate special occasions. They don't brag about their drinking or make light of drunkenness. And they don't drive drunk or tolerate drunk driving by others. Starting with yourself, make driving while intoxicated socially unacceptable behavior.

In families where adults abstain from drinking, children still need to know the facts about alcohol. Parents should talk with their children at an early age in a calm, unemotional manner and explain why the adults in their family don't drink. These children will then be better prepared to make responsible decisions about drinking when they are adults.

Respect

Research has shown that the example parents set for their children does make an impact, especially during the critical teen years. According to an annual survey conducted by the research firm Roper Starch Worldwide, an overwhelming majority of children ages 13 to 17 say that their parents have the greatest influence on the decisions they make about drinking. By setting a good example and encouraging dialogue on the subject of drinking from an early age, parents can play a key role in helping their children make good decisions.

Abuse is never a good example

Negative reasons to drink include attempting to relieve depression, loneliness, or boredom...or to escape reality...or as a "medicine" to get through a bad day.

Parents who do not set a good example as responsible drinkers — those who abuse alcohol — have a special reason to curb their drinking or seek help. Children from families where there is alcoholism have a greater chance of becoming alcoholics themselves, possibly because they learn from their parents.

If you drink responsibly, your children will learn responsible drinking attitudes and practices more easily from your example. They'll understand that alcohol beverages are

meant to be enjoyed, not abused — but your example is not enough. Your children also need you to talk with them about it.

This article was derived from the Family Talk guide for parents, developed by an advisory panel of authorities in the fields of education, family therapy, and alcohol treatment, and through conversations with parents and teens. The full guide may be read online or downloaded by clicking on Document Library on www.familytalkonline.com.

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