

Practice Good Parenting

Many of the things that parents can do to help their children avoid drinking may seem to have little to do with the subject. But they are very important. Several of these go hand-in-hand:

- Help your child feel good about himself/herself.
- Create an atmosphere of open communication.
- Be an active family.
- Teach problem-solving and responsible decision-making skills.

Building your child's self-confidence and self-esteem are two of the most important things you can do as a parent. This helps give children the courage to stand alone, if necessary, and to make decisions based on the values you've instilled in them.

Praise and encouragement build a child's self-image — but the recognition must be legitimate and credible. That means helping a young person discover what makes him or her special and unique.

For children, a strong sense of self is key to being the best they can be in a number of areas. That's a big payoff in and of itself for parents, and studies have repeatedly shown that kids with a high self-image are less likely to drink.

Create an atmosphere of open communication

Take time to listen. No subject should be out of bounds or off limits. Don't lecture or be a know-it-all, and don't render snap judgments that can end a conversation before it really begins.

Listening allows parents to "get inside" a child's head, to see things as a child sees them and help sort out matters so they make sense. It helps parents find out what a child already knows — what is understood correctly and what is not.

Listening becomes even more important during the teen years, so lay a firm foundation when your child is young.

Parents who are willing and ready to talk about all sorts of things and to accept the value of their children's viewpoints make it easier for children to talk and learn about sensitive subjects.

Be an active family

Families who do things together learn more about each other, share more, and have more opportunities to communicate. Kids feel more important when their parents spend time with them. And parents find out more about why their kids are special, especially if each parent spends some time alone with each child.

Sometimes it seems like a challenge to find something interesting for kids and adults to do together. But there are lots of activities — go to a baseball game, the zoo, or a movie. Play games or sports. Make time to share your evening meal together.

Learn to appreciate what your child enjoys — friends, music, heroes, and the like. A whole range of possibilities exists through youth organizations such as scouting and sports groups — ones in which you can participate as a volunteer. That's a special way to spend time with your kids and get to know their friends, as well.

Sharing good times is one of the best ways to really get to know your children. Then, when concerns or problems arise, they're much easier to deal with because you've built a firm foundation of love and trust.

Teach problem-solving and responsible decision-making skills

One way to help children make proper decisions about drinking is to let them practice making responsible decisions about lesser issues as they grow up.

From the time they are preschoolers, children can be taught to solve problems and make their own decisions. They can be given responsibilities and allowed to learn from their mistakes. And if a child makes a mistake, such as getting a poor grade on a test because he didn't study, you can discuss the error calmly and help him learn from it.

Helping kids think through situations and consider the pros and cons of certain actions will give them a good foundation to build on when they're faced with important choices as they get older.

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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