

IS MY CHILD DRINKING? WHAT DO I DO

First, How Can I Tell?

If your child has been drinking, there will be physical, behavioral and psychological signs.

Physical Signs:

- Bloodshot eyes
- Change in eating or sleeping patterns
- Change in or not caring about physical appearance
- Shakes or tremors, particularly in the morning
- Unusual body odor
- Injuries or bruises

Behavioral Signs:

- Change in behavior at school – missing school, skipping class, slipping grades
- Change in behavior at home – arguing, isolating, withdrawing
- Using mouthwash or incense to cover up smells
- Sudden change in peers or where they hang out and what they do
- Money or valuables missing
- Hiding from you, locking doors, or being secretive

Psychological Signs:

- Moody, irritable, or easily angered
- Change in personality
- Change in level of motivation – seems spacey, unmotivated, or lethargic
- Prone to paranoia
- Appears withdrawn or depressed

What Do I Do First?

Start by having a conversation with your child/teen.

- Prepare for this conversation so that you are not panicked, angry, or anxious
- Remember the goal is to listen to your child and gather information
- *"I have noticed that you have been quiet and sad lately. I worry when you don't seem your usual self. What's been going on? How things have been going."*
- Or start with a direct approach regarding alcohol. Perhaps, *"Tell me what you think about alcohol"* or *"What are some of the stories you hear about drinking at school?"*



What Next?

Now, likely two outcomes have resulted from your conversation:

I Have Talked With My Child/Teen, and I Am Reassured That My Child/Teen Is Not Drinking Alcohol.

- *“I’m so glad we can have these conversations, and I appreciate you being truthful with me. I am also glad that you have made the choice not to drink alcohol.”*
- *“You should be proud of the choices you’ve made. I know that the pressure to drink alcohol at your age can be intense.”*

I Have Talked With My Child/Teen, and I Am Still Concerned That My Child/Teen Is Drinking... ...And My Child/Teen Is Concerned as Well.

- Try to withhold judgement and anger about your child’s/teen’s choices, keep your questions open ended, and be comfortable with silence as you and your child/teen process this conversation.
- *“I am concerned about your alcohol use, and it sounds like you might be concerned as well. You also are aware that since you are under age 21, drinking is illegal. It is also a rule in our household that you cannot drink before the age of 21. How can we work together to make some changes around this behavior?”*

OR ...My Child/Teen Is Not Concerned.

- The earlier you intervene, the easier it will be for your child/teen to get back on track. Sometimes intervening is as simple as telling your child/teen that you are concerned and having an intentional conversation about what you are noticing. Other times intervening might involve getting professional help.
- *“I am really concerned about your drinking. Remember, I was your age once, and I know what it’s like to deal with pressure from friends and the stress of school and sports. I am here to support you. Because you are still living in our home, I am also responsible to keep you safe and prevent you from behaviors that could ruin your future. Talk to me about what we can do to turn this behavior around.”*

Listen to your child/teen without judgment and communicate that this is not a legal choice for them at this age. Keep in mind that while the choice to drink may have been a result of peer pressure or the desire to “look cool,” drinking may also be a way for your child to manage deeper issues like depression, anxiety, or stress. Work with your child/teen to uncover the core issues and identify appropriate treatment to handle these issues in a healthy and appropriate manner.