

ALCOHOL.....NOT COOL

Getting the Right Message "Hey, who wants a drink?"
"Oh, come on, just one drink won't hurt you. It's fun."
"It's cool. Everybody drinks, right?"

Wrong.



Drinking alcohol is dangerous for kids and teens and sometimes for adults, too. Alcohol is a drug, and it is the drug most abused by teens. Many kids have their first drink at an early age, as young as 10 or 11 or even younger.

It's easy for kids to get the wrong message about alcohol. They might see their parents drink or watch TV commercials that make drinking look like a lot of fun. You might see people drinking and watching sports together or having a big party.

But alcohol is actually a depressant. That means it's a drug that slows down or depresses the brain. Like many drugs, alcohol changes a person's ability to think, speak, and see things as they really are. A person might lose his or her balance and have trouble walking properly. The person might feel relaxed and happy and later start crying or get in an argument.

What Happens When People Drink?

When people drink too much, they might do or say things they don't mean. They might hurt themselves or other people, especially if they drive a car. Someone who drinks too much also might throw up and could wake up the next day feeling awful — that's called a hangover.

Drinking too much alcohol can lead to alcohol poisoning, which can kill a person. Over time, people who abuse alcohol can do serious damage to their bodies. The liver, which removes poisons from the blood, is especially at risk.

Because alcohol can cause such problems, the citizens and government leaders in Canada and the United States decided that kids shouldn't be allowed to buy or use alcohol. By setting the drinking age at between 18 and 21, they hope older people will be able to make good decisions about alcohol. For instance, they don't want people to drink alcohol and drive cars because that's how many accidents occur.

What Is Alcoholism?

What can be confusing about alcohol is that some grown-ups seem to be able to enjoy it occasionally with no problems. Other people, though, can develop a problem with it. Sometimes, that's called alcoholism (say: al-kuh-**hol**-ism) or being an alcoholic (say: al-kuh-**hol**-ik). Someone who has alcoholism craves alcohol. The person has little control over his or her drinking and can't stop without help. A person who starts drinking alcohol at a young age is more likely to develop alcoholism.

Alcoholism is chronic, which means it continues over time. It often gets worse, too, because the person may start experiencing health problems related to drinking. In

addition to causing liver problems, long-term drinking can damage the pancreas, heart, and brain.

Say No

It can be tempting to try alcohol. It's normal to be curious about new things, especially if it seems like everyone is doing it. But everyone is **not** drinking alcohol. Don't believe it if someone says you're immature for not drinking. You're actually more mature (which means grown up) because you're being strong and smart.

Still, it can be hard if you feel unpopular because of your decision. Good friends won't stop being your friend just because you don't want to drink alcohol. If you feel this kind of pressure, talk to someone you trust.

And if you're concerned about a friend who's drinking, you should tell one of your parents, a school counselor, or another trusted adult. That way, someone can talk with your friend before the alcohol causes a big problem. Unfortunately, some kids who drink may also drop out of school, get in car accidents, start fights, or join in crimes.

But with help, anyone who has a problem with alcohol can be successful at stopping. And if you're still a kid, help yourself by not starting in the first place.

What Kids Are Saying

The grownups in your life have probably told you that you aren't allowed to have alcoholic drinks, such as beer or wine. But what do kids think about this issue? KidsHealth wanted to know, so we asked 690 kids ages 9 to 13.

Most kids said teens who drink [alcohol](#) are **not** cool. More than 90% of the kids said they are very uncool (86%) or uncool (6%). And 89% of kids said that drinking alcohol at their age (9 to 13) was never OK. That shows that a lot of kids are pretty smart about the dangers of alcohol. They probably know that it's risky for kids to drink alcohol because:

- It can make them sick (like making them throw up, pass out, or worse).
- It can hurt their ability to make good decisions.
- It can make them do things that are embarrassing.
- It can get them into trouble (with parents or police).

- It can be addictive, meaning that the person might start **needing** alcohol to feel good.

But what about the kids who didn't agree? Three percent of kids said, at their age, it was always OK to drink alcohol. And although 90% of kids said they never tried alcohol, or only tried it once, 6% of kids said they often drink more than a sip — every week or every month.

Young kids who drink might be kids who don't have common sense, take risks without realizing danger, or don't listen to adults. Kids like this often have other problems, such as being disrespectful to people or property. They also might fight, lie, [steal](#), or [bully](#).

Some kids might drink because they have problems they don't know how to deal with. These kids need caring adults to help them solve their problems in a healthier way.

Drinking alcohol is bad for your [brain](#) and your health, but kids who drink can decide to be successful at stopping. Caring adults can teach kids how to give and receive respect, take better care of themselves, and make better choices. In addition to parents, a caring adult could be an aunt or uncle, an older sibling, doctor, teacher, or school counselor.

Kids might start drinking alcohol because it makes them feel good at first or like they can escape their problems for a while. The trouble with this is that drinking alcohol makes them feel bad or sick afterward — and they may become addicted to it. And as for the problems — they're still there anyway, because escaping doesn't solve any problem.

Why Do Kids Try Alcohol?

Here are the top three reasons kids gave when asked why they try alcohol:

1. to look cool
2. to see what it's like
3. because other kids are doing it

All kids want to be cool. The good news is that most kids we surveyed don't think drinking makes a person any cooler. But the few kids who said they drink seem to believe it does. In other words, *they* might think they're cool, even though other kids don't.

It's easy to see how a kid might get the wrong message about alcohol. If you have seen beer commercials on TV, the people drinking it seem like they're having a good

time. They often feature bar or party scenes or people watching sports on TV. Why can't kids have this kind of fun?

Well, alcohol also has a darker side. Alcohol is a [depressant](#). That means it slows down or depresses the brain. Like many drugs, alcohol changes a person's ability to think, speak, and see things as they really are. A person might lose his or her balance and have trouble walking properly. The person might feel relaxed and happy, and later start crying or get in an argument.

When people drink too much, they might do or say things they don't mean. They might hurt themselves or other people, especially if they drive a car. Someone who drinks too much also might throw up and could wake up the next day feeling awful — that's called a hangover. Over time, someone who abuses alcohol can do serious damage to his or her body. The liver, which removes poisons from the blood, is especially at risk.

Because alcohol can cause such problems, the citizens and government leaders in this country have decided that kids shouldn't be allowed to buy or use alcohol. By setting the drinking age at 18- 21, they hope older people will be able to make good decisions about alcohol. For instance, they don't want people to drink alcohol and drive cars because that's how many accidents occur.

If you know someone who is drinking, you might tell one of your parents, a teacher, or a [school counselor](#). The person may need help, counseling, or other treatment to stop using alcohol. It's also OK to ask questions about alcohol and ask for help if you feel pressure to drink it. Often, parents are a strong source of support because they want you to stay healthy and they don't want you to get in trouble.

Sometimes it can be hard for kids to say no if someone offers them alcohol. They might feel [peer pressure](#) to do what someone else is doing, even if they know better. Other kids might act as if drinking alcohol makes a person grown up or say that a kid who refuses to use alcohol is uncool or immature. But kids can say no to peer pressure when they know their own minds and know that alcohol can be dangerous or harmful to them.

Some of the kids we surveyed said having other fun things to do was a good way to prevent underage drinking. Even more kids (nearly half) had a really good thought on how to prevent drinking: They said kids should learn more about the dangers of alcohol from doctors and nurses, through lessons at school, and by talking with people who have had alcohol problems.

That's smart because the more kids know about alcohol, how it affects people, and the dangers of underage drinking, the better they can be at making good decisions about their own behavior. And that — unlike drinking alcohol — is truly cool.

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