



Center for Prevention and Counseling
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Dear Sussex County Parents,

As parents, you play a crucial role in influencing your child's alcohol use. You control the availability of alcohol in your household, serve as role models of alcohol use, influence family norms on alcohol use, and set alcohol-related expectations for your child. Nevertheless, the efforts of even the most conscientious parents can be challenged by teens' easy access to alcohol throughout the community and the reality that parents cannot constantly monitor their child's activities to keep them alcohol-free. A recent Adolescent Drug and Alcohol Survey conducted by the Center for Prevention and Counseling showed that 4% of 6th graders, almost a quarter of 9th graders and over half of 12th graders in the state have consumed alcohol in the *last month*. Underage drinking could be happening in your own home, or the homes of your child's friends- a problem facing many parents. The message is clear: Young teens still need plenty of adult supervision AND guidance.

Communicate to your child that underage drinking is against the law, and that using alcohol is risky and unnecessary. Plus, lots of smart, cool people choose not to drink alcohol. Your values and attitudes count with your child, even though they may not always show it. Parents who express expectations that their child remain alcohol free have kids who use alcohol less, have better refusal skills and stronger resistance to negative peer influence. Make sure your child knows where you stand on underage drinking, and that you will be there to support them in their decision to say no. Don't miss the chance to help them stay alcohol-free. Some ways to support them:

Develop Family Rules About Teen Drinking. First time consumption is experimentation, but any consumption after that is "use." Accepting use as "normal experimentation" is dangerous because it requires a judgment call on how much experimentation is "normal." Allowing your kids to drink in your presence is dangerous for several reasons: 1) it indicates to kids that laws are flexible; 2) it assumes that kids will not use alcohol when on their own, and 3) it sets up a continuing process of negotiation over when and how much is okay to use.

By establishing clear, "no alcohol" rules and expectations, your child is less likely to begin drinking AND it liberates you. Since it is a law, you do not have to continually justify or negotiate it. Once you have chosen rules for your family, you will need to establish and communicate appropriate consequences for breaking those rules. This makes your KIDS accountable because then it is not you who is choosing to punish them, but rather they who chose an action that was illegal and against family rules, which carries with it an established set of consequences. If your child knows that they will lose certain privileges each and every time an alcohol use rule is broken, they will be more likely to keep their agreements.

Monitor Alcohol Use in Your Home. If you keep alcohol in your home, keep track of the supply. Make clear to your child that you don't allow unchaperoned parties in your home. In addition, never serve alcohol to your child's underage friends as it will leave you liable for any damages that may result. Also, research shows that kids whose parents or friends' parents provide alcohol for teen get-togethers are more likely to engage in heavier drinking, to drink more often, and to get into traffic accidents. If possible, however, encourage him or her to invite friends over when you are at home. The more entertaining your child does in your home, the more you will know about your child's friends and activities.

We encourage you to use the enclosed bottle hanger not only as a reminder to maintain control of alcohol in your home, but as an opportunity to talk to your children about "house rules" against underage drinking. It's not as hard as you might think. Keep in mind, too, that you don't need to cover everything at once. In fact, you're likely to have a greater impact on your child's drinking by having a number of talks (not lectures!) about alcohol use throughout his or her adolescence. Check out TimeToTalk at www.drugfree.org for easy-to-use guides and tips to help you have ongoing conversations with your kids to keep them healthy and drug-free.

Underage drinking is a problem that affects the entire community. Everyone must take responsibility to send a strong no-use message. You can also join school and community efforts to discourage alcohol use by teens. By working with school officials and other members of your community, you can help to develop policies to reduce alcohol availability to teens and to enforce consequences for underage drinking. By working together, we can reduce the acceptance of underage drinking and improve the future of our children.

Sincerely,

Members of the Sussex County Coalition for Healthy & Safe Families



Every Child Deserves a Safe Place to Grow