

Research shows that children with more frequent and high-quality contact with non-parental adults have fewer behavior problems.[[1]](#footnote-1) As leaders who work with youth, you’re a great influence on the lives of young people. We’ve created points to keep in mind when talking to youth about alcohol.

**When it comes to alcohol, protect your future.**

1. Alcohol causes changes in the developing brain. If you drink alcohol before the age of 21, you put yourself at risk for brain damage, including memory loss, trouble focusing, and difficulty understanding information—and these issues can last your whole life.
2. If you begin to drink before the age of 21, you put yourself at increased risk of becoming addicted to alcohol and other substances.
3. If you have important plans for your life, like performing well on your sports team and getting into your college of choice, alcohol gets in the way. If you become dependent on alcohol, you can’t focus on your goals.
4. If you’re struggling with depression and anxiety, drinking alcohol can make your condition worse. While alcohol may seem to improve your mood in the short term, its general effect makes symptoms more severe. Alcohol can counteract effects of psychiatric medication, making conditions more difficult to treat. It also increases the side effects of medication and can cause dangerous reactions.
5. Alcohol can negatively affect your appearance. Because alcohol causes dehydration, if you use alcohol, you may develop flushed, uneven skin in the short term, and more wrinkles in the long term.
6. Alcohol is high in empty calories. It provides few nutrients and can cause weight gain.
7. Binge drinking can kill: Heavy drinking can cause sudden death from heart failure, lead to severe dehydration, cause infection in the lungs, cause dangerously low blood sugar, and inhibit the gag reflex which can cause you to choke on your own vomit.
8. When you’re using alcohol, your inhibitions are lower, so you’re more likely to engage in other risky behavior including the use of other substances. Alcohol use can cloud your senses: making you less alert to dangers other people can present. Using alcohol can also result in poor choices that harm others.
9. Most teens DO NOT use alcohol. According to a 2019 survey of Vermont youth[[2]](#footnote-2), 70 percent of high school students reported they did not drink alcohol in the past 30 days, and the number of young people who drink alcohol has been decreasing over the past decade.

**Learn more:**

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1. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10560-005-2546-4>, *Journal of Extension* https://www.joe.org/joe/2010october/pdf/JOE\_v48\_5tt4.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2019 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, state-wide results, alcohol https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/CHS\_YRBS\_statewide\_report.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)