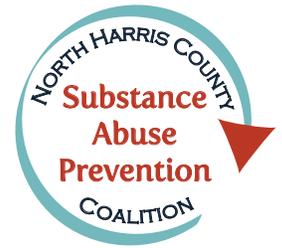




# Alcohol Abuse Prevention



As children approach their teen years, they begin to experience many emotional and physical changes, and these changes are not always easy. During this challenging time, some children may experiment with alcohol.

For most children, it is not just one thing that influences them to drink, but rather a combination of factors.

## Factors:

**Stress:** When children worry about things like grades, fitting in, and physical appearance, they may use alcohol as a way to escape their problems.

**Peer Pressure:** The age range between 11 and 18 is an impressionable period when youth are especially susceptible to outside influences such as peers, family members, and the media.

**Transitions:** Life events such as transitioning from middle school to high school, breaking up with a significant other, moving, or divorce can cause children to turn to alcohol.

**Environment:** If children grow up in an environment where their parents or peers drink a lot and/or view drinking favorably, they may be more likely to drink themselves.

**Genetics:** Children who come from a family with a history of alcoholism are at an increased risk for becoming alcoholics.

## What you can do:

- ▶ Encourage your child to get involved in sports or other extracurricular activities as a healthier way to cope with his or her problems.
- ▶ Help boost your child's confidence by helping him or her learn different ways to say "no" and reminding him or her that real friends would not pressure him or her to drink.
- ▶ Reassure your child that things will get easier, and make sure he or she knows that drinking is not a solution.
- ▶ If you choose to drink, set a good example by drinking in moderation, and make sure your child knows that underage drinking is not acceptable.
- ▶ If alcoholism runs in your family, have an honest discussion with your child to make sure he or she understands the seriousness of the disease.

## Warning Signs:

Although the following signs may indicate a problem with alcohol or other drugs, some also reflect normal growing pains. Experts believe that a drinking problem is more likely if you notice several of these signs at the same time, if they occur suddenly, or if some of them are extreme in nature.

- ▶ Mood changes: flare-ups of temper, irritability, and defensiveness
- ▶ School problems: poor attendance, low grades, and/or recent disciplinary action
- ▶ Rebellion against family rules
- ▶ Friend changes: switching friends and a reluctance to let you get to know the new friends
- ▶ A “nothing matters” attitude: sloppy appearance, a lack of involvement in former interests, and general low energy
- ▶ Alcohol presence: finding it in your child’s room or backpack or smelling alcohol on his or her breath
- ▶ Physical or mental problems: memory lapses, poor concentration, bloodshot eyes, lack of coordination, or slurred speech

## Finding Help:

### Do not play the blame game

It is hard for most parents to believe that their child might be caught up in underage alcohol use and in need of professional help. Do not feel bad if you did not see the warning signs until your child was in trouble or until someone told you about the problem. When most parents find out about their child’s underage drinking, they feel shocked and stunned and wonder where they went wrong.

In getting help for a child who drinks, the first thing to do is to try not to blame yourself or your child. The important thing is to act now to find the best available services to help your child stop using alcohol and begin building an alcohol-free future.

### Talk with people you know

If you are seeking treatment for a child’s mental health or substance abuse problem, you can start by talking with people you know such as family members, friends, schoolteachers, counselors, clergy, and your doctor. Your health insurance company can give you a list of mental health and substance abuse providers. If your employer has an employee assistance program, you can get a referral there. Your child’s school may suggest a good substance abuse treatment program. If not, the school district is likely to have a substance abuse prevention and counseling program. Contact them for help.

### Find a local resource

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator (<http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/faq.htm>) includes a Quick Search feature (<http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/TreatmentLocator/faces/quickSearch.jsp>) to help you find details about drug and alcohol abuse treatment programs in your area.

Information from this page was adapted from SAMHSA and the “Talk. They Hear You.” campaign. For more information visit [www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov](http://www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov).