



be the influence

talk with your children about alcohol



a guide for parents





Table of Contents

A Bit About This Book	3
It's Never Too Soon to Start Talking	4
Why Do Some Kids Start Drinking?	5
Alcohol Basics	6
General Information	6
Short-Term Effects	8
Long-Term Effects	9
Discussing Alcohol by Age Group	10
Preschoolers	12
School-age kids	12
Preteens	13
Teens	14
Conversation Starters	15
Resources	16

A Bit About This Book

Be the Influence is a program from the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) to help shape children's perceptions about alcohol by providing tools and information that can help parents discuss alcohol with their children. The program materials were developed with guidance from the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM).

Talking to children is key. In Manitoba, the average age at which a child first tries alcohol is 11. Of course, some kids may wait until they are of legal drinking age or may never drink at all. Unfortunately, others will consume their first drink at an even earlier age, starting a cycle of alcohol misuse that can cause long term physical and social effects.

The good news is that as a parent, you are the single biggest influence in your children's lives, especially concerning their attitudes toward alcohol. That's why MLCC and AFM encourage you to Be the Influence.

Take 15 minutes now to read through and discuss this book with your children. Those 15 minutes might be the ones that help them make positive decisions about alcohol for the rest of their lives.

And remember, alcohol use should not be a one-time discussion - it should be a topic of ongoing conversation as you recognize opportunities to be the influence and talk with your children about alcohol in everyday life.

If you're not talking with your children about alcohol, who is?

Be the influence. Talk with your children about alcohol.

For more information and ideas, visit

www.betheinfluence.org

It's Never Too Soon to Start Talking

Children become aware of alcohol at an early age - that's a fact of life in today's society. Whether you drink around your children or not, they are continually exposed to images and messages about alcohol from outside sources, including TV, movies and advertising.

It's time to turn down the noise and speak up. As a parent, you are the single biggest influence in your children's lives - especially when it comes to their attitudes about alcohol.

MLCC and AFM recommend that parents start having serious talks about alcohol with their children by age eight, in an ongoing, age-appropriate, open dialogue, rather than as a one-time lecture. However, you can start building the foundations for those discussions when your children are much younger.

When an opportunity to discuss alcohol presents itself, initiate a conversation. Your children most likely have questions about alcohol that they are afraid to ask. To get them comfortable talking with you about alcohol, it's important that you remain calm and caring and encourage them to ask you anything. But remember - actions speak louder than words, so make sure to model responsible behaviour.

If you are uncomfortable talking with your children about alcohol, you're not alone. Just remember that your children will be exposed to alcohol at some point in their lives and they'll need to know how to react. It's up to you to teach them.

If there is a history of alcohol abuse in your family or among close friends, it is even more important that you help your children understand the risks and warning signs of alcohol misuse. This will prevent them from repeating the same behaviours and will help them cope in situations where others are intoxicated.



THIS BOOK WILL HELP YOU:

- Create opportunities for one-on-one interaction and private discussion
- Encourage and practise honesty and openness in your discussions
- Provide age-appropriate, factual information
- Recognize opportunities to start conversations about alcohol.

FACT: Children who begin drinking before the legal age are more than twice as likely to develop alcohol-related problems. Those who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependencies later in life.

- "Teen Tiplers: America's Underage Drinking Epidemic," National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, 2003

Why Do Some Kids Start Drinking?



In Manitoba, the average age kids first try alcohol is around 11

Not every child is going to try alcohol by Grade 5 or 6. Some may wait until they are of legal drinking age. Some may never drink at all. The question parents need to ask is why might a child try alcohol in the first place?

There's no one reason a child might try alcohol. Like adults, every child and every situation is different. But there are some reasons why children might make that choice:

- They associate alcohol with positive experiences.
- They want to appear older by modeling the behaviour of parents and older siblings.
- They witness frequent alcohol use by parents and other family members.
- They are able to get alcohol, often from home or from parents or older siblings.
- They give in to peer pressure.
- They are impulsive and don't think about consequences.



There are also reasons why children who try alcohol might keep drinking:

- To be more assertive, talkative or popular.
- To forget their self-esteem issues.
- To try to cope with stress.
- To actively defy their parents, teachers or other adults.
- To gain attention from their parents, teachers or other adults.
- Because they have a genetic predisposition toward alcohol dependency.

FACT:
About
30%
of all students who drink say their
parents get alcohol for them.

- "Alcohol and Other Drug Use by Manitoba Students,"
Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, 2005



As a parent, you are the biggest influence on your children. Use your influence to give them information and encourage positive decision-making about alcohol that they can use for their entire lives.

Alcohol Basics

General Information

Before you talk to your children about alcohol, it might be good to brush up on some basic facts.

1

Beverage alcohol, known as ethyl alcohol or ethanol, is made by fermenting fruits, vegetables or grains. Another type of alcohol called methyl alcohol, or methanol, is found in products like hairspray and antifreeze and is poisonous to drink.

2

Beer, wine and spirits are all common types of beverage alcohol. There are also an increasing number of products like coolers and flavoured beverages that contain alcohol but look like energy drinks.

3

A standard drink is considered to be a 355 ml (12 oz.) bottle of beer, a 150 ml (5 oz.) glass of wine or about 40 ml (1.25 oz.) of spirits such as whiskey, vodka or rum.



4

In their standard serving sizes, beer, wine and spirits all contain about the same amount of ethyl alcohol - 13.5 grams.

5

As soon as you drink alcohol, it enters your bloodstream. If you've recently eaten, the alcohol is absorbed more slowly. If your stomach is empty, it's absorbed faster and you feel the effects more quickly.

6

Once it's in the bloodstream, alcohol travels to organs and tissues, like the brain, liver, heart, kidneys and muscles. The liver processes about 90% to 95% of the alcohol you drink before being excreted through the kidneys.

7

Alcohol is a depressant that slows brain activity and decreases tension. In small amounts, this can have a relaxing effect but in large doses it can lead to coma or death.

8

In Manitoba, the legal drinking age is 18. Legal age is 19 in some other parts of Canada and is 21 in the United States.



BATTLE OF THE SEXES

A woman will feel the effects of alcohol faster than a man even if their age, height and weight are the same. Women's bodies contain less water, causing an increase in blood alcohol concentration.

Effects: Short-Term

The more immediate short-term effects of alcohol will vary depending on how much a person drinks. However, because children's bodies are smaller and still developing, it doesn't take as much alcohol to have a major impact.

Short-term effects can include:

- Feeling relaxed and sociable
- Poor decision-making (including deciding to drink and drive)
- Difficulty walking, slurred speech, blurred vision
- Increase in aggressive or violent behaviour
- Drowsiness, dizziness or feeling flushed
- Passing out
- Nausea and vomiting
- Blackouts (inability to remember events)

There are also post-drinking consequences to consider, commonly known as hangovers.

Hangovers can include any or all of the following:

- Headaches
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light or sound
- Shakiness
- Vomiting

WHAT IS ALCOHOL POISONING?

Alcohol poisoning happens when a person's blood alcohol concentration rises so high that it becomes toxic to the body. This causes a drop in body temperature, a loss of muscle tone and difficulty breathing and can result in coma or death.

**IF YOU SUSPECT SOMEONE HAS ALCOHOL POISONING,
CALL 911. MEDICAL ATTENTION IS REQUIRED.**



Effects: Long-Term

Years of continuous heavy drinking can have a tremendous negative impact on the body. In some cases, long-term effects can be irreversible, leaving a person with significant health problems for life.

Long-term effects can include:

- Skin problems
- Stomach ulcers
- Vitamin deficiencies
- Impotency and infertility
- Changes in mood and behaviours
- Brain damage including memory loss
- Damage to organs such as the heart, liver and kidneys

When people who drink heavily over several years try to quit, their bodies go through withdrawal. Withdrawal symptoms can include:

- Aches
- Pains
- Increased blood pressure
- Rapid pulse and breathing
- Nausea and vomiting
- Feelings of panic
- Seizures
- Hallucinations
- Depression
- In severe cases, death

To help manage withdrawal symptoms in a safe and healthy way, professional rehabilitation care is recommended for those who are trying to break the cycle of drinking addiction.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL DON'T MIX


Alcohol can interact with many legal medications and illegal drugs, causing immediate negative effects. In the worst case scenario, this can lead to coma or death. Even common remedies - like pain relievers, allergy meds and cough syrups - can violently interact with alcohol.



Discussing Alcohol by Age Group

Kids learn as they grow, which means that there are different ways to talk to them about alcohol depending on their age. Here are a few things to keep in mind no matter what age your child is:

- If you drink, be aware of your behaviour around alcohol. Think about how often you drink and how much you drink at an average event. Do your children ever see you intoxicated? What do you say and how do you act?
- If you don't drink, you still need to talk to your child about alcohol. Abstinence is an action your children may choose to model. But you can't abstain from talking with your kids about alcohol because they will still be getting information from other sources. If you abstain from alcohol for personal or religious reasons, it is important that you discuss your beliefs with your children.
- Answer when asked. Some kids may bring up the topic of alcohol by asking you a question. That's the perfect time to start opening the lines of communication, so don't avoid the question.
- It's okay not to have all the answers. If there's something you don't know, tell your child you don't know and then use that opportunity to find the answer together. The time you spend learning together can make a lasting impression – and make what you learn more meaningful.
- Turn alcohol advertising to your advantage. When an advertisement comes on TV, it's an opportunity to ask your children what they think of the ad... and what they think about alcohol.
- Speak to the situation. If you serve alcohol to guests or come from a culture where wine is served with dinner, use these opportunities to talk to your children about your views on responsible drinking and your personal rules about alcohol in the house.
- Talk about your own experiences. Parents often share stories about friends, family members and themselves with their children. Sometimes, those stories may involve people who had issues with alcohol. Don't be afraid to tell your child how those people affected your life and shaped your views about alcohol. It can help them understand why you feel it's an important topic.
- Make sure that your talk about alcohol is a talk. Don't just make a speech about how bad alcohol is - especially if you drink. You don't want your children to think you're doing something bad or wrong. Encourage them to ask questions. Listen to what they say without getting angry, negative or defensive. Ultimately, you want your children to feel comfortable enough to come to you if they have questions or problems in the future.



“Some kids may bring up the topic of alcohol by asking you a question. That’s the perfect time to start opening the lines of communication, so don’t avoid the question”

Preschoolers (Age 4 and under)

Let's be honest: preschool-age children aren't going to understand a lot about alcohol no matter how you explain it. But they're still absorbing a lot of new information as they watch the world around them.

That means the best thing you can do is to spend quality time with your preschooler and be a good role model in all areas of life - especially when it comes to your drinking habits.

MEDIA MATTERS

In 2003, nearly 700,000 alcohol advertisements aired on Canadian television stations.

– Association to Reduce Alcohol Promotion in Ontario (ARAPO) update, Winter 2005



FACT:

Children younger than 8 years old do not understand the notion of intent to sell and frequently accept advertising claims at face value.

– Pediatrics, Vol. 118, No. 6, December 2006

School-Age Kids (Ages 4-7)

Once they're in school, children may start learning about alcohol from other kids. That's why it's so important to be as aware as possible about what they're watching or hearing. Talk about alcohol-related things you see together on TV, in movies or in real life and be sure they're getting factual information.

Children this age also often enjoy learning about how the body works.

This is a good time to talk about things like:

- Healthy living habits, including not drinking alcohol while they're young
- The way alcohol enters the bloodstream then travels to other parts of the body like the brain, liver, kidneys and muscles
- How alcohol can make a person have trouble walking, talking or making safe decisions
- How too much alcohol can make people feel sick with headaches, throwing up and shakiness.

Don't be scary; be factual - especially if you drink occasionally yourself. You don't want your children to think you're doing something wrong or to worry about your health. The important thing is that your kids understand that they shouldn't drink and that adults who do drink should do so responsibly.

Preteens (Ages 8-11)

Around this age, children are starting to do more things on their own, including forming their own close friendships. Since those friends are going to start having some influence, you need to stay involved and aware of what your children are doing.

- **Know your children's friends and meet their parents when possible**
- **Be aware of where your children are and who they're with**
- **Establish clear house rules regarding alcohol and drinking**

At this age, kids are also starting to understand the concept of actions and consequences, so it may be a good time to discuss things like:

- **Laws regarding alcohol**
- **More detailed effects of alcohol on the body**
- **Responsible drinking**
- **Family history if it involves alcoholism**

You can even use alcohol-sponsored sports events or alcohol-product advertising to start conversations. In addition to talking about alcohol, you can talk about things such as:

- **Why alcohol companies sponsor sports events**
(i.e. good publicity, positive associations)
- **Ways advertising tries to appeal to people**
(i.e. music, attractive people, fun)
- **Why alcohol companies advertise**
(i.e. sell product)

Studies have shown that if kids understand how advertising and other types of media messages work, the messages have less impact.

BEWARE THE BUBBLES

Carbonated drinks - like champagne, sparkling wine, coolers and spirits mixed with soda - pass through the stomach very quickly. Combined with a sweet taste that makes them easy to drink, this can lead to rapid intoxication.



Teens (Age 13 and up)

It's just as important to talk to your teens about alcohol as it is to talk to your younger kids. When kids hit junior high and high school, you can be sure they will encounter opportunities to try alcohol. Those opportunities continue to increase as your teens get older.

Staying involved in your children's lives and being aware of who they are with and what they are doing is key. Some things you might want to look at doing include:

- Re-establishing the rules of the house - especially for when friends are over
- Having your teens keep you informed of their plans and having them check in regularly
- Discussing laws regarding alcohol - including drinking and driving laws
- Talking about the dangers of binge drinking by visiting sites like www.beundrunk.com

Above all, teach teens to make smart choices in situations where they or others have been drinking... and let them know they can always call you for help. If they know you're there for them, it makes dealing with situations involving alcohol a lot easier.

WHAT IS BINGE DRINKING?

Binge drinking is a problem, especially among teens and young adults. By definition, binge drinking is consuming five or more alcoholic beverages in any one session. By social standards, it is getting drunk. Find out more about binge drinking - and how to prevent it - at www.beundrunk.com



FACT:

Teens who have two or fewer family dinners per week are twice as likely to smoke daily and get drunk monthly than teens who have at least five family dinners per week.

- "The Importance of Family Dinners III", National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, 2006

 **Once your children reach 18, the choice to drink alcohol is ultimately theirs. Have you prepared them to make responsible choices?**

Conversation Starters

Any situation where people drink is an opportunity to talk to your kids about alcohol. Consider these common scenarios:

At the dinner table, when you're having wine or other alcohol

- This is your chance to talk about responsible, moderate consumption.

When you're entertaining or attending a social event where alcoholic beverages are served

- This is your chance to teach your child that it's the atmosphere that makes it fun, not the alcohol.

Watching TV or movies where the characters are drinking

- This is your chance to talk about appropriate and inappropriate behaviours when consuming alcohol.
- It's also your chance to talk about peer pressure and to ask your kids what they would do in the same situations.

Catching up on the latest celebrity gossip—especially about DUI charges for some popular young stars

- This is your chance to talk about the consequences of alcohol misuse.

Watching sports

- This is your chance to help your kids think critically about the messages they receive. Alcohol companies buy a lot of commercial airtime during sports events. The problem is some children may think you can't enjoy sports without alcohol.

REMEMBER

Alcohol use should not be a one-time discussion. It should be a topic of ongoing conversation as you recognize opportunities to be the influence and talk with your children about alcohol in your everyday life.





be!

the influence

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Resources

Visit www.betheinfluence.org for more information, resources and interactive exercises to help you be the influence and start talking with your children about alcohol.

If you or someone you know needs help fighting an addiction to alcohol, contact the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba at www.afm.mb.ca or call the Winnipeg region administration office at 204-944-6200 or toll free at 1-866-638-2561.

MLCC gratefully acknowledges and thanks AFM for their assistance and support in developing the Be the Influence program.



www.betheinfluence.org