

♥ What Best Friends Parents Can Do to Help

Prevent Teenage Drinking

We suggest that parents:

- Remember the drinking age is 21 in every state. Serving, purchasing or allowing youth under 21 to consume alcohol is illegal.
- Communicate openly with your child about alcohol. Share your concerns. Let the teen share hers.
- Host non-alcoholic parties or locate other non-alcoholic activities to entertain adolescents.
- Host a party centered around a theme. Keep the guest list short and invite only teens you know. Specify all rules before you begin the party including the starting and ending times. Circulate regularly during parties, checking all rooms of the house and yard.
- If your teen is attending a party at another home, call the parents to make sure alcohol is not allowed and they will be home during the event.
- Teach your child that resisting peer pressure to drink is a sign of maturity and self-respect.
- Be a role model for your child. What you do counts far more than what you say.
- Set rules and consequences for your teen to live by and then stick with them.
- Do not try to be your child's best friend. This will clarify your role and responsibilities as a parent.
- Know where your teen is at night. Have a telephone number where you can contact them.
- Be active in your teen's life. Attend school meetings and ask questions regarding her daily life. Know all your teen's friends and the parents of those friends.
- Alcohol lessens inhibitions. Explain that drinking leads to serious consequences such as sex, teen pregnancy, violence and traffic crashes.
- Join a parent organization such as a PTA. You may find you are not alone in your concerns.

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Prevent Teen Pregnancy

We suggest that parents:

1. Be clear about your own sexual values and attitudes. Best Friends teaches that adolescents should postpone sex until marriage.

2. Talk with your children early and often about sex, and be specific. Kids have lots of questions about sex, and they often say that the source they'd most like to go to for answers is their parents. Start the conversation, and make sure that it is honest, open, and respectful. If you can't think of how to start the discussion, consider using situations shown on television or in movies as conversation starters. Tell them candidly and confidently what you think and why you take these positions. Be sure to have a two-way conversation, not a one-way lecture. Ask them what they think and what they know so you can correct any misconceptions. Ask what, if anything, worries them.

Age-appropriate conversations about relationships and intimacy should begin early in a child's life and continue through adolescence. Resist the temptation that there should be only one conversation. If you have regular conversations, you won't worry so much about making a mistake or saying something not quite right, because you'll always be able to talk again.

HERE ARE THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS KIDS SAY THEY WANT TO DISCUSS:

How do I know if I'm in love?

In Best Friends, the girls learn the difference between love and sex. It takes time for love to develop. A true boyfriend is a guy who is truly a friend, a person around whom you are a better person, who wants the best for you, and who will respect your wishes not to have sex until marriage.

How do I tell my boyfriend that I don't want to have sex without losing him or hurting his feelings?

Best Friends girls learn to tell boys early in a relationship that they have standards and do not engage in premarital sex, drugs or alcohol. They learn refusal skills for how to say "no." A boy friend who continues to pressure them for sex is not a real friend and is not worth keeping. Best Friends girls support one another's decisions to wait until marriage to have sex. Best Friends provides better things to do, better ways to have fun as an adolescent free of the complications of sexual activity, so they can develop into healthy and accomplished young women.

Tell your children what you think. Don't be reluctant to say, for example:

- I think kids in high school are too young to have sex, especially with today's risks.
- One of the reasons I am concerned about teens drinking is that it often leads to sex and other risk behaviors.
- You don't have to have sex to keep a boyfriend. If sex is the price of a close relationship, find someone else.

Research clearly shows that talking with your children about sex does not encourage them to become sexually active. The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health of 90,000 adolescents in 1995–96 found that parents who give clear messages about delaying sex have children who are less likely to have early intercourse.

And remember, too that your own behavior should match your words. The “do as I say, not as I do” approach is bound to lose with children and teenagers, who are careful and constant observers of the adults in their lives.

3. Supervise and monitor your children and adolescents. Establish rules, curfews and standards of expected behavior, preferably through an open process of family discussion and respectful communication.

4. Know your children's friends and their families. Friends have a strong influence on each other, so help your children and teenagers become friends with kids whose families share your values. It is easier to enforce a curfew that all your child's friends share rather than one that makes her different – but even if your views don't match those of other parents, hold fast to your convictions. Welcome your children's friends into your home and talk to them openly.

5. Discourage early, frequent and steady dating.

Group activities among young people are fine and often fun, but allowing teens to begin steady, one-on-one dating much before age 16 can lead to trouble. Let your child know about your strong feelings about this throughout childhood – don't wait until they are adolescents.

Best Friends girls are encouraged to go places in groups and to select their friends carefully. They are cautioned to avoid people and situations that make them feel uncomfortable, where there is pressure to engage in sex or take drugs or alcoholic beverages. They must always have a plan to get home and have money with them to call parents or take a taxi home.

6. Take a strong stand against your daughter dating a boy significantly older than she is. Older guys can seem glamorous to a young girl – sometimes they even have money and a car. But the risk of matters getting out of hand increase when the guy is much older than the girl.

The Best Friends Safety Rules say that a Best Friends girl chooses companions and boyfriends who are close to her own age. A Best Friends girl should not date a guy who is more than two years older than she is.

7. Help your teenagers to have options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood. The chances that your children will delay having sex until marriage and avoid teen pregnancy or early parenthood are significantly increased if their futures appear bright.

Encourage your daughters to participate in all Best Friends activities. Best Friends is a youth development program designed to provide girls with opportunities and life skills. We emphasize academic achievement, community service, singing and dancing in a positive and upbeat manner. Best Friends girls set short and long term goals and develop plans to achieve them. We encourage girls to attend college. Best Friends Foundation replication sites may offer college scholarships.

8. Let your kids know that you value education highly. Encourage your children to take school seriously and set high expectations about their school performance. School failure is often the first sign of trouble that can end in teen parenthood.

To date, there is a 100% high school graduation rate among Best Friends high school girls who are called Diamond Girls. Diamond Girls are eligible to compete for Best Friends college scholarships.



9. Know what your kids are watching, reading and listening to. The media (television, radio, movies, music videos, magazines, the Internet) are full of material sending the wrong messages. Sex rarely has meaning, unplanned pregnancy seldom happens, and few people having sex are married. It is important to talk with your children about what the media portray and what you think about it.

In Best Friends, girls are encouraged to examine messages they are receiving from music, magazines and television. They learn what they see in the media is not always true and to leave the room if pornography is present.

You can always turn off the TV, cancel subscriptions, and place certain movies off limits. You will probably not be able to fully control what your children see and hear, but you can certainly make your views known and control your own home environment.

10. The first nine tips for helping your children avoid teen pregnancy work best when they occur as part of strong, close relationships with your children that are built from an early age. Strive for a relationship that is warm in tone, firm in discipline and rich in communication and one that emphasizes mutual trust and respect. There is no single way to create such relationships but the following habits of the heart can help:

- Express love and affection clearly and often. Hug your children and tell them how much they mean to you. Praise specific accomplishments, but remember that expressions of affection should be offered freely, not just for a particular achievement.
- Listen carefully to what your children say and pay attention to what they do.

- Spend time with your children engaged in activities that suit their ages and interests, not just yours. Shared experiences build a “bank account” of affection and trust that forms the basis for future communication with them about specific topics, including sexual behavior.
- Be supportive and be interested in what interests them. Attend their sports events; learn about their hobbies; be enthusiastic about their achievements, even the little ones; ask them questions that show you care and want to know what is going on in their lives.
- Be courteous and respectful to your children and avoid hurtful teaching or ridicule. Don't compare your teenager with other family members (i.e. why can't you be like your sister?) Show that you expect courtesy and respect from them in return.
- Help them to build self-respect by mastering skills. Remember self-respect is earned, not given, and one of the best ways to earn it is by doing something well.
- Try to have meals together as a family as often as possible, and use the time for conversation, not confrontation.

It is never too late to improve a relationship with a child or teenager. Don't underestimate the great need that children feel – at all ages – for close relationships with their parents and for their parents' guidance, approval and support.

The ten major points and most text under each point are reprinted from Ten Tips for Parents: To Help Their Children Avoid Pregnancy with permission from The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, (www.teenpregnancy.org), Washington, D.C.

Italicized text was added for parents of Best Friends girls by the Best Friends Foundation, Washington, D.C.

