

Parenting for Prevention: Substance Use & Misuse: Boys

Substance use and misuse by youth is harmful to their physical, mental, behavioral, and social health. When alcohol or other drugs are used during adolescence there is an increased risk for the disruption of normal brain development, negative health outcomes, the diagnosis of a substance use/misuse disorder, and addiction. Having conversations with your teen about the potential risks of underage use are important, but having the right information is critical. Research has shown that there are differences between boys and girls with respect to risk, substance choice, reasons for using substances, and impact on health. The information and resources on this tip sheet can assist parents, guardians, and caregivers with having meaningful and appropriate conversations that address specific needs and risks associated with substance use & misuse by boys.



Why Having PREVENTION Conversations with your Teen NOW is Important

Most of what we know about substance use with respect to gender and sex differences is a result of research on adult use. Gender differences are based on culturally defined roles; sex differences result from biology. This information is extremely helpful in primary prevention efforts, as it informs the conversations we can have with boys about the long-term risks based on gender and sex differences, and the potential negative impact on his own personal health. When compared to girls, boys:

Alcohol

- Have higher rates of alcohol use, including binge drinking (as adults)
- Are more likely to drink excessively and to drink larger amounts
- Have higher rates of alcohol related deaths and hospitalizations
- Are more likely to commit suicide and to have been drinking before suicide

Nicotine & Tobacco

- Are more likely to abuse tobacco

Marijuana

- Are more likely to use marijuana
- Are more likely to experience marijuana induced highs
- Have a higher severity of cannabis use disorders
- Are more likely to have a co-occurring antisocial personality disorder
- Are more likely to report poor family relationships or problems at school

Opioids

- Are more likely to misuse or abuse prescription pain medications

In addition, teenage boys ...

- Start at an earlier age
- Abuse more often and in larger amounts
- Engage in multi-drug use
- Are more likely to use illicit drugs in high school and college

Talking Tips: How to Start a Conversation

- ✓ Start early – the sooner you begin talking with your children about making healthy choices, the easier it will be to tackle more challenging topics as they get older.
- ✓ Use everyday opportunities to talk about substance use – in the car, while making dinner, or when your teen comes home from school.
- ✓ Mention an item about you saw in the news or read in the newspaper. Ask - and listen to - their perspective.
- ✓ Identify opportunities you see on TV, or on social media. Ask them how they feel about how substances are being portrayed.
- ✓ Be clear about your expectations, no-use rules, and consequences about substance use. Listen to what your teen has to say. Let them ask questions.
- ✓ Keep the conversations going – talking about alcohol and underage drinking is not a one-time event. Kids who hear consistent messages on a regular basis about not drinking are at a lower risk for trying alcohol.

The Gender Gap

Gender specific attitudes about alcohol use are overwhelmingly reinforced for boys. Young boys receive media messages (social media, song lyrics, TV, movies) that connect alcohol use to masculinity. These attitudes are often reinforced by older male adults in the family, peer groups, and community norms.

Taking a Closer Look at Alcohol

While alcohol remains the most abused substance by both teenage boys and girls, these risks are specific to men and should be discussed with teen boys.

- 2x more likely to binge drink
- Between the ages of 12-17, prevalence of alcohol use disorders (AUD) in males and females are similar. By age 18, males showed significantly higher rates.
- As boys approach adulthood, they are increasingly more at risk for problematic drinking and alcohol use disorders (AUDs)



The Developmental Perspective & Boys

The rates of substance use for adolescent boys and girls tend to be fairly similar until young adulthood. Around the age of 18, patterns in male substance use begin to shift away from patterns in female substance use. Certain physiological and social factors appear to have a role in the increase for risky substance use in males.

- A generally lower response to alcohol and later brain maturation and executive functioning contribute to a greater risk for dangerous drinking
- A stronger direct relationship between parental alcohol use and intentions to drink (in boys than girls) suggests that boys may be more directly influenced by parental drinking
- Cultural double-standards that surround parental monitoring and punishment for deviant behaviors, such as allowing more freedom for male adolescents to interact with peers who use alcohol, can be a risk factor for alcohol use
- Male teens are more likely to perceive parental control as way of inhibiting independence, possibly contributing to alcohol use as a way to assert autonomy
- Males are more likely to overestimate peer use of alcohol, which tends to increase rates of own use
- Gender role socialization and the linking of masculinity and intoxication are gender-specific attitudes that are constantly reinforced for boys and increase risk for unsafe drinking

RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/mens-health.htm>

DrugFree.org

<http://www.drugfree.org/news-service/casa-finds-differences-in-why-girls-vs-boys-use-cigarettes-alcohol-and-other-drugs/>

US National Library of Medicine: National Institute of Health

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2756494/>

Portions of this tip sheet were adapted from some of these resources

Parenting for Prevention is a Decisions at Every Turn Coalition educational series for parents and other caring adults to increase awareness and knowledge about important issues youth issues and to encourage dialogue about making healthy choices.

Please visit <http://www.AshlandDecisions.org/parent-tip-sheets.html> for our complete library of tip sheets.