

Parenting for Prevention: Substance Use & Misuse: Girls

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 girls.



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 girls about the long-term risks based on gender and sex differences, and the potential negative impact on her own personal health. When compared to boys, girls:

Alcohol

- Have higher death rates from alcohol use when diagnosed with an SUD (substance use disorder)
- Experience greater harm to their health from long use, even if she has been drinking for a shorter amount of time (than men)

Nicotine & Tobacco

- Smoke fewer cigarettes
- Smoke cigarettes with less nicotine content
- Do not inhale as deeply
- May smoke to regulate stress and mood

Marijuana

- Are more likely to experience impaired spatial memory
- Are more likely to experience depression, anxiety & panic attacks with use
- Have a quicker onset of cannabis use disorder

Opioids

- Are more likely to have chronic pain, which may contribute to high rates of opioid prescriptions
- Are more likely to take an opioid without a prescription to self-medicate for anxiety or depression

In addition, teenage girls ...

- Perceive more potential benefits to using alcohol or other drugs
- Are more likely to see self-medicating benefits
- Respond more positively to the statement "using drugs helps kids deal with problems at home"
- Are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, PTSD and eating disorders

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

Research conducted over the last decade shows that women and girls are drinking more. One possible factor is that the stigma around women drinking is fading. Women may be more susceptible to cultural and social influences such as celebration, the social aspect of drinking, and the need to drink to "unwind".

Taking a Closer Look at Alcohol

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

- Women take longer to break down/remove alcohol from the body
- Women absorb more alcohol due to body chemistry
- When drinking equal amounts, women have higher alcohol levels, the immediate effects occur more quickly, the effects of alcohol last longer, and are more likely to cause long term health problems
- Women become addicted to alcohol more quickly
- Women “telescope” (advance to alcohol dependence) more quickly
- Women who drink more than light to moderate (7x week) at higher risk for car crashes, traumatic injuries, cancer, hypertension, stroke, suicides and alcohol use disorder



Alcohol Advertising & Girls: Alcopops and the Risk of Exposure

The alcohol industry uses deceptive practices to make their products more appealing. While it is illegal to sell alcohol to minors under 21, magazines, social media, TV, movies, and the products themselves portray images of fun, celebration, and popularity – all enticing to teens. A review of these practices show that girls are especially at risk for advertising by companies that market alcopops (sweet malt beverages) which have appealing fruity or sugary flavors.

- Longitudinal data shows that frequency of exposure to alcohol advertising to girls in Grade 7 predicts alcohol consumption and alcohol related problems by Grade 9.
- Teenage girls see more advertising for alcopops than legal age women on a per capita basis
- Teenage girls (12-20) are exposed to more magazine advertising than target age women (21-34)
- Girls may be particularly susceptible to alcohol advertising, especially to alcohol-branded merchandise (ABM). One study found that 10-to 14-year-old girls who owned ABM were 3.3 times more likely to start using alcohol within 1-2 years than girls who did not own ABM. There was no relationship between owning ABM and early initiation of drinking in boys in this age group.⁶
- Flavored alcohol brands such as Smirnoff Ice, Mike’s, and Bartle’s & Jaymes are twice as popular among underage girls as they are among underage boys.

What the Industry Says

“The beauty of this category (alcopops) is that it brings in new drinkers, people who really don’t like the taste of beer”.

“This is the perfect ‘bridging beverage’ between carbonated fruit juices and the new hard lemonades”.

RESOURCES

Alcohol Policy MD

http://www.alcoholpolicymd.com/alcohol_and_health/alcopops_and_girls.htm

Center on Alcohol Marketing & Youth

<http://www.camy.org/resources/fact-sheets/women-girls-and-alcohol/>

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/womens-health.htm>

Everyday Health: Effects of Alcohol on Women

<http://www.everydayhealth.com/womens-health/effects-of-alcohol-on-women.aspx>

Substance Use in Women: National Institute on Drug Abuse

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/women-drugs>

Women & Alcohol

<http://www.helpguide.org/harvard/women-and-alcohol.htm>

Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board

<http://www.liq.wa.gov/education/teen-girls-and-alcohol>

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 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.

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