

About the Campaign

Underage Drinking



The "Talk. They Hear You." Underage Drinking Prevention National Media Campaign empowers parents and caregivers to talk with children early about alcohol and other drug use.

Problem of Underage Drinking and Substance Use

High rates of youth alcohol use, shifting state laws regarding marijuana, and the nation's opioid crisis are prevalent health concerns that affect America's parents and caregivers. Preventing underage alcohol and substance use is critical for the following reasons:

- Approximately 88,000 Americans die from alcohol-attributed causes each year, making alcohol the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States.
- An estimated 2.1 million people ages 12 or older had an opioid use disorder, and nearly 30 percent of those who use marijuana may have some degree of marijuana use disorder.

Through the Sober Truth on Underage Drinking Act, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) created the "Talk. They Hear You."® Campaign to address the problem of underage drinking and substance misuse.

The "Talk. They Hear You."® Campaign's goal is to provide parents and caregivers with the resources they need to address the issue of alcohol and other drugs with children under the age of 21. The campaign has historically equipped parents with the knowledge and skills to increase actions that reduce and prevent underage drinking. Recently, it has expanded its messaging to include other substances such as marijuana and prescription drugs. The campaign now offers resources to help parents talk to children of all ages about alcohol and other drugs.

Consequences of Underage Drinking and Substance Use

Rates of underage drinking and substance use in the United States are high. ([See the latest statistics.](#)) Underage drinking and other drug use can have severe consequences for children under 21, including the following:

- Injury or death from accidents;
- Poor school performance; and/or
- Poor judgment and decision-making.

Alcohol and other drugs can also harm child brain development.

Importance of Parents

Parents have a significant influence in their children's decision to experiment with alcohol and other drugs. Although it may not seem like it, when parents talk about underage drinking and substance use, their children do hear them.

Help Talking with Children Under 21

"Talk. They Hear You."® originally focused on helping parents with children ages 9–15 to prevent young people from starting to drink. However, research suggests the chances that children will try alcohol or other drugs increases as they get older. Around age 9, children begin thinking alcohol may not be just for adults. By the time they are seniors, almost 70 percent of high school students will have tried alcohol, half will have taken an illegal drug, and more than 20 percent will have used a prescription drug for a nonmedical purpose.

In 2018, "Talk. They Hear You."® expanded its resources to include tools for parents and caregivers of children of all ages under 21 to help them continue having underage drinking and substance use prevention conversations beyond age 15.

Campaign Goals

The "Talk. They Hear You." campaign aims to accomplish the following:

1. Increase parents' **awareness of the prevalence and risk** of underage drinking and substance use;
2. Equip parents with the **knowledge, skills, and confidence** to prevent underage drinking and substance use; and
3. Increase parents' **actions to prevent underage drinking and substance use.**