

Alcohol and the Developing Brain



Discovery
EDUCATION



GRADE
RANGE
5–7

DIGITAL EXPLORATION | FAMILY ACTIVITY

ASK, LISTEN, LEARN: SAYING “NO” TO UNDERAGE DRINKING

REFUSAL ROLE-PLAYING AND EXIT STRATEGIES

Overview

In this activity, you and your family work together to strengthen your child’s ability to say “NO” to underage drinking and avoid situations where they may be pressured to drink. Your child begins by sharing what they learned in the [Ask, Listen, Learn: Alcohol and the Developing Brain Digital Exploration](#). Your family then discusses the importance of developing situational awareness and understanding how mindset affects our decision-making. Together you explore why it is important for your child to have refusal and exit strategies in place in advance. And finally, your family brainstorms real-life scenarios and role-play refusal and exit strategies to help your child build confidence and comfort in saying “NO” to underage drinking.

Note to Adults

Parents, YOU are the number one influence on your kids’ decision to drink or not to drink alcohol; you play a huge role in helping your kids learn why and how to say “NO” to underage drinking. In fact, 64% of 10–18 year-olds report that their parents have the greatest influence on their decision to drink or not drink alcohol (Toluna, August 2016). In addition to having regular conversations with your kids about underage drinking, you can help them learn to recognize signals that indicate underage drinking may take place (or may be taking place). This awareness can help them avoid or remove themselves from dangerous situations. Regularly practicing refusal strategies with your kids helps them develop a mind set for saying “NO” to underage drinking so they do not have to worry about what they will say “in the moment.” Reminding them that underage drinking is both risky and illegal behavior should also be emphasized. Activities like this one—along with the parent resources available at [Discover Brain Body Behavior](#) and [Ask, Listen, Learn](#) will help you support your kids in learning why they should say “NO” to underage drinking and how they can do so effectively.

Materials

- [Ask, Listen, Learn: 10 Ways to Say "NO" Infographic](#)
- **Handout: Your Scenarios**
- [Alcohol and the Developing Brain Family Resource](#)

Procedure:

1. To help you prepare for this activity, consider viewing the video [The Science Behind the Effects of Alcohol on Your Brain](#). Also, check out the [Alcohol and the Developing Brain Family Resource](#).
2. Begin the family activity by having your kids explain what they learned in the *Ask, Listen, Learn: Alcohol and the Developing Brain* Digital Exploration. Explain why you are having this conversation with them: so they understand why it is important for them to say “NO” to underage drinking and learn effective strategies for doing so.
3. Watch the video [Informed Students Make Better, Healthier Decisions](#) with your kids.
4. Discuss the idea of “trusting your gut” that Nathan Adrian mentioned in the video. Ask questions such as the following to facilitate the conversation:
 - What does it mean to you to trust your gut?
 - In what sorts of situations might it be useful to trust your gut?
 - Imagine a situation that makes you feel uncomfortable. Why does it make you uncomfortable? Where do you feel it? How do you want to respond in that moment?
 - Share a time that you were uncomfortable and trusted your gut. What did you do? How did it work out?
5. Remind your kids that the best way to stay out of trouble is to avoid risky situations in the first place and that underage drinking is illegal. They can do that by developing situational awareness—an understanding of times and places in which alcohol may be present and they may be asked or pressured to drink underage and illegally.
6. Brainstorm with your kids some situations in which they might be asked to engage in underage drinking. Some situations may already have happened. Include them so your child can revisit the situation. Some examples follow:
 - A family party with alcohol available for 21+ adults
 - Hanging out at a house with friends when no adults are home
 - A bonfire in the evening at the beach or in a park
7. Record the scenarios on the **Your Scenarios** handout, then cut the scenario strips apart.
8. Choose one scenario and read it aloud. To prepare for the role-play, discuss the following together:
 - What are the signs in this situation that indicate someone may ask you to drink alcohol?
 - What would you say or do to avoid this situation?
 - Imagine you are in this situation. What would you say to exit quickly and safely? What would you do?
 - Who could you ask for help?

- How does your mindset affect how you might handle a situation like this one? In other words, how might your decision-making process be different if you are tired, angry, or energized? How might it be different if you are alone or with friends?
 - Why do you think it's important to understand the impact of mindset on decision-making?
 - How can you change your mindset to ensure you're making a decision that is healthy (and legal)?
- 9.** Role-play the scenario along with the refusal and exit strategies you and your kids want to try. If possible, record the strategies so you can practice them again in the future. Consider video recording the role-play in order to help your kids analyze the “danger” signals and refine their exit strategies.
- 10.** It is likely your kids will be with at least one friend (and maybe more) in situations that involve alcohol. After the role-play practice, ask your kids to think about how they can help their friends avoid situations where they may be asked to drink alcohol and say “NO” to underage drinking. Ask questions such as the following:
- If a friend were with you and needed help, how could you help them say “NO” to underage drinking?
 - How can you help your friends develop and use situational awareness?
 - If you are with a group of friends in a situation involving underage drinking, many of them may feel like you do and want to make healthy decisions. However, they may not know how. They may not have developed situational awareness or refusal strategies. How could you help a group of friends stay out of trouble and say “NO” to underage and illegal drinking?

Note to Adults: Encourage your kids to use the word “NO” in their refusal statement and to demonstrate non-verbal messages that indicate that they are resolute in their refusal. Examples include crossed arms, hands on hips, or “back off” hand gestures. A firm voice and repetition help indicate determination.

- 11.** Work with your kids to create a backup plan for situations in which their refusal and exit strategies may not work. For example, help them brainstorm a text message that will be a code for needing assistance.
- 12.** In order for adolescents to develop an awareness of the signals and a confident response, they should continue to practice over time. Revisit this activity and discussion monthly (or as often as needed) until your kids can react with self-assuredness to a range of scenarios.

Additional Resources from *Ask, Listen, Learn*:

Ask, Listen, Learn Game: [Brain Trivia](#)

Ask, Listen, Learn Game: [Brain Storm](#)

[Ask, Listen, Learn Videos](#)

Your Scenarios

Some example scenarios could include:

- A family party with alcohol available for 21+ adults
- Hanging out at a house with friends when no adults are home
- A bonfire in the evening at the beach or in a park