



A Parent's Guide to Underage Drinking Prevention

This guide is brought to you through a partnership between the Carmel Central School District, the Prevention Council of Putnam, and the Carmel Communities That Care Coalition, united by a shared mission: to educate and empower parents and caregivers with accurate, practical information to help keep children safe and healthy.

Why This Matters

- Alcohol is the most commonly used substance among youth in the United States. 33% of Carmel 12th graders report drinking alcohol in the past 30 days (Source: 2024 Prevention Needs Assessment Survey).
- During adolescence, the brain undergoes significant growth and change that are essential for a healthy transition into adulthood. Alcohol use during the teen and young adult years can disrupt this development, with effects that may last a lifetime.
- Even occasional drinking can affect a young person's brain development, safety, academic success, and long-term health. Parents and caregivers play a critical protective role.

Understanding Underage Drinking

- The legal drinking age is 21 in all U.S. states.
- The adolescent brain continues developing into the mid-20s, and alcohol can interfere with memory, decision-making, and emotional regulation.
- Youth who start drinking before age 21 are more likely to develop alcohol use problems later in life.

Risks of Underage Drinking

- Injuries and accidents (car crashes, falls, drowning)
- Risky behaviors, including unsafe sexual activity and other substance use
- Mental health impacts, such as anxiety and depression
- Poor school performance and increased absenteeism
- Alcohol poisoning, which can be life-threatening

Signs Your Child May Be Drinking

- Sudden changes in mood or behavior
- Declining grades or school attendance
- Secretive behavior or lying
- Smell of alcohol or missing alcohol at home
- Changes in friendships or activities

No single sign confirms alcohol use, but patterns matter.

How Parents and Caregivers Can Help

1. **Talk Early and Often.** Start conversations early, keep them age appropriate, and revisit them often. Be clear about your expectations while remaining calm and open.
2. **Model Healthy Behavior.** Youth learn from what they see. Responsible choices at home matter.
3. **Set Clear Rules & Consequences.** Consistent rules about alcohol reduce risky behavior.
4. **Know Where and With Whom Your Child Spends Time.** Supervision and connection are protective factors.
5. **Encourage Healthy Coping Skills.** Support stress management through sports, hobbies, sleep, and open communication.

What to Do If You're Concerned

- Speak with a healthcare provider, school counselor, or trusted professional.
- Seek guidance early. Support works best before problems escalate.
- If there is immediate danger (i.e., alcohol poisoning), call 911 right away

Support and Helplines

The Prevention Council of Putnam: 845-225-4646

Free confidential referral and information

NYS OASAS (Office of Addiction Services and Supports)

Provides referrals to outpatient and inpatient treatment programs

24/7 HOPEline: 1-877-8-HOPENY (1-877-846-7369) or text **HOPENY (467369)**

SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Free, confidential treatment referral and information (24/7)

Trusted Sources and Resources

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

<https://nida.nih.gov>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Underage Drinking

<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/underage-drinking.htm>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<https://www.samhsa.gov>

U.S. Surgeon General – Talk. They Hear You.® Campaign

<https://www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)

<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov>