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When  
Talking  
About

Alcohol

A GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS, AND CAREGIVERS

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# Binge Drinking

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**FACT:** Drinking five or more alcoholic beverages in a row within two hours qualifies as binge drinking for men. For women, it takes only four drinks in a row within two hours.<sup>1</sup>

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As a high school sophomore, Cici was invited to a friend's home for a party. When she arrived she found that her friend's parents had set up a bar and were serving margaritas.

"Cici drank and got sick as dog," Cici's mom Joan says. "She called her dad and asked for help."

Cici's dad Will immediately picked her up. They didn't talk much. Cici was throwing up. Through the night, Will watched his daughter to be sure that she was safe and not choking in her sleep.

Cici's family lives in a community where many parents are lenient when it comes to underage drinking. So, Will and Joan had started talking with Cici about the risks of alcohol use when she was 10 years old. Doing so laid the groundwork for their conversation the morning after the party.

*Nearly 90 percent of tenth graders and 75 percent of eighth graders think that alcohol is fairly easy or very easy to get.<sup>3</sup>*

the first step in doing the right thing—setting and enforcing rules—even when the child complains about the rules.

**Dr. Rauch:** It's important to speak to parents in a home where alcohol has been served to teens. One approach is to call with an update: "I'm not sure you realized that Cici was sick from the alcohol available at the party. I'm sure you didn't intend for her to get drunk. But it was really upsetting to us. I wish you'd checked with us before serving our underage child."

**Dr. Johnson:** The party was a potential disaster. Children could have died. The responsibility of a parent is to talk to other parents, not just with their own child. When trying to connect with other parents, any way you can begin the conversation without anger will make them more approachable.

**Dr. Rauch:** And it's much easier to call *before* a party to find out whether they are appropriate adults for supervising your child. You can say, "The kids have organized a party. Do you know about it? I want to make sure alcohol won't be allowed. I hope you don't mind my asking, but I don't like Billy to go to parties where there is alcohol." Then hear what the parent says.



*"Alcohol-related incidents are a leading killer of young people. Our job is to ensure that our children are safe."*

Dr. Johnson

# Drinking and Driving

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**FACT:** On a typical weekend, an average of one teen is killed every hour in a car crash. Almost half of those crashes involve alcohol.<sup>14</sup>

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Robert was an honor student and a skilled soccer player. He predicted that one day he'd go to the Olympics, and everyone else thought so too. He was on top of the world.

In high school, Robert continued to excel on the soccer field, but other things changed. His grades dropped. He seemed to like hanging out with friends more than anything. "We'd all meet and we'd drink," Robert recalls. "And we got away with it."

His parents Ashley and Bob knew that Robert drank from time to time. They thought he was just a typical teen.

One night the summer Robert turned age 16, he and his best friend had been drinking, and Robert was driving. He called his mom to check in, and then headed for a party.

The car was going 60 to 80 miles per hour when Robert lost control and slammed into a tree. "My right leg stayed in the car, and the

*“Robert says he felt invincible. He was denying the risk involved with drinking and driving.”*

Robert

**Dr. Rauch:** Alcohol impairs judgment. Many teens get behind the wheels of cars after drinking because, after a beer or two, they’ve lost their ability to make good decisions. As Robert says, a few beers might make them feel good, but it can give them a false sense of well being, make them less careful, and slow their reaction time.

**Dr. Johnson:** Robert says he felt invincible. He was denying the risk involved with drinking and driving. He wanted to do something he knew was dangerous. So he blocked out the knowledge that drinking and driving is illegal and dangerous.

Ashley’s denial was a defense mechanism too. When something is frightening, like knowing your child is behaving in an unsafe way, you decide not to think about it. You tell yourself it will be all right. But kids’ drinking is Russian Roulette.

**Dr. Rauch:** Children see lots of friends drinking. Nothing bad happens, so they assume they can drink too. Parents are often no different than their teenagers. They remember drinking as teens and surviving. They ask themselves, “How can I judge my child’s behavior? I wasn’t perfect.” But that robs their children of mature guides who help them understand that bad things don’t happen only to other people.