

Help kids take a stand against alcohol and drugs



With prom and graduation seasons here, teenagers may face more opportunities than usual to experiment with drinking and drug use. Kids turn to these substances not only to look cool and fit in with the crowd but also because they may help them feel good, ease their nerves, and make socializing easier.

Alcohol and drugs are addictive and harmful, as well as illegal. Using and abusing them can lead to everything from bad decisions to death. But there's much more for Christian teenagers to consider when they're faced with temptations of drugs and alcohol than just being "safe."

In the Bible, Jesus instructs his followers to stay awake and alert in our everyday lives. He said Satan is stalking us like a "roaring lion" (see 1 Peter 5:8), and he wasn't kidding. God instructs us to take up his armor (see Ephesians 6:13-17) so we can stand firm and resist temptation. He also tells us to walk in the light (see 1 John 1:7). Nothing neutralizes our impact for God's kingdom faster, broader, and deeper than shadow living. Whatever we do, we should train kids to live their lives in the light—away from the shadows that give Satan, God's enemy, room to operate and leverage to sideline us.

So when you talk to your teenagers about the physical and legal reasons to steer clear of drugs and alcohol, remember to mention the spiritual reasons as well. Then stop talking and set an example by how you live. God knows about all the temptations we face and wants to be the first place we turn during difficulties.

Here's a rundown on what really keeps kids away from alcohol and drugs—and what doesn't:

WHAT WORKS

- Kids who have "an active spiritual life" are half as likely to end up as alcoholics or drug addicts. This is true only for kids who make a personal choice to pursue a spiritual life.
- Kids are at higher risk of becoming substance abusers if they're highly stressed, frequently bored, or have too much spending money.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

- Kids who go to schools that test them for illicit drug use are likelier to use drugs than are students at other schools.
- Education programs aimed at reducing drinking among college students may actually encourage more drinking.
- Experts now say stepped-up enforcement to try to cut off the drug supply doesn't really work.

(Group Magazine)



Contrary to media reports and popular opinion, not all teenagers are into drugs and alcohol. Check out a few of the latest findings:

- By the time they're seniors in high school, 36% of all teenagers have experimented with illegal drugs. *(Office of National Drug Control Policy)*
- Every day, 2,500 teenagers use a prescription drug to get high for the first time. *(drugfree.org)*
- When American young people were asked what makes them happy, only 8% said drinking makes them "very happy." And 55% said the question doesn't apply. *(MTV/AP)*
- Alcohol use continues to decline among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders, as does use of cigarettes and meth. Meanwhile, marijuana use is on the rise. *(Office of National Drug Control Policy)*



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Start conversations with your teenagers about drinking and drugs by using these discussion starters:

1. What motivates people to drink or do drugs? What's appealing about getting drunk or high?
2. Why do people believe drunkenness or drug use can fill their emptiness? Can you be both drunk (or on drugs) and filled with God's Spirit? Why or why not?
3. Why should Christians avoid drugs and alcohol? Is it merely because they're illegal or bad for you? Explain.
4. When everyone else seems to be drinking or using, how can you be clean and sober?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. God will help your teenagers resist the temptations of alcohol and drugs, finding fulfillment from positive sources instead.
2. Your teenagers will be able to recognize the false promises of happiness and "coolness" offered by alcohol and drugs.
3. Among friends, your teenagers can take a strong stand against mind-altering substances.
4. God will bless your teenagers for pursuing a relationship with him rather than chasing after the "high" from drugs and alcohol.

Verse of the Month

"Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit." (Ephesians 5:17-18)

Many lives have been ruined—and even destroyed—by alcohol and illegal substances. They seem to offer people of all ages quick solutions to common life experiences of pain and loneliness. But only God's presence can truly fill our deepest longings. God wants his children to make wise decisions that honor him, and he promises to renew our weak spirits with his all-powerful Holy Spirit.

Going Deeper

At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, youth-culture expert Walt Mueller offers these tips for teaching your teenagers about alcohol.

Most teenagers are left to get their information about alcohol from unreliable sources. Some learn from their friends. Others learn from the media. Only about one in three middle school and high school students say their parents talk to them "often" or "a lot" about tobacco, drugs, and alcohol. Alcohol education should start when we tell our preschoolers not to accept candy, gifts, pills, or rides from strangers. As they grow older, educate kids on the different types of alcohol they'll encounter and the dangers and effects of each. Don't overstate the danger by saying that everyone who drinks beer will die. Rather, tell kids about the potential short- and long-term harmful effects of alcohol abuse in a truthful, realistic manner. Don't assume that because teenagers are likely to experiment it's best to give them both the alcohol and a place to drink "safely."

Seize teachable moments as kids encounter alcohol use and abuse in the media. Teach them to discern the false messages. Help them pick apart the ridiculous promises and nature of alcohol ads. Teach them that it's against the law for minors to buy or drink alcohol. Teach kids that God has given them the responsibility to obey laws. Read and study Romans 13:1-3, 6-7 with your kids. And if they get caught, be sure they're given the wonderful opportunity to learn by suffering the legal consequences of their actions. Don't work to "fix" any of the legal ramifications. Read together what Scripture says about drunkenness in passages such as Proverbs 23:20-21; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:19-21; and 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8. Finally, walk your talk. A code of biblical moral conduct lived out in the house is the most powerful shaper of your child's own spiritual values and behaviors.



MUSIC SPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Canadian R&B singer Justin Bieber, 16, was discovered on YouTube. His boyish good looks and songs about teenage love make girls swoon. Bieber's new album debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard charts. He's already sung for the president, presented at the Grammys, and scored the opening line in the "We Are the World" benefit remake.

Albums: *My World 2.0* (2010), *My World* (2009)

What Parents Should Know: Bieber's lyrics are clean, and other than a duet with the often-crude Ludacris, Bieber seems to be making good choices. He wants to follow the career trajectory of Usher and Justin Timberlake, but time will tell if he steers clear of their penchant for sex-soaked lyrics.

What Bieber Says: "There's a lot of stuff [on the album] that's not just about love. Real life isn't perfect, so my album kind of portrays that. You just have to make the best of what you have."

Discussion Questions: Have you known someone whose life seemed perfect? How can appearances be deceiving? What pressure, if any, do you feel to be perfect? Read aloud Matthew 23:25-28. Why was Jesus so harsh to people who pretended they were perfect? Does this mean we shouldn't strive for godly behavior? Why or why not?

Christian Artist

Background: MercyMe has been a staple of contemporary Christian music since forming in 1994. Their crossover hit "I Can Only Imagine" helped their debut album, *Almost There*, go double-platinum. MercyMe, which has been nominated for numerous Dove and Grammy awards, was recently named Billboard's Christian Artist of the Decade.

Albums: *The Generous Mr. Lovewell* (2010), *Coming Up to Breathe* (2006), *Undone* (2004)

What Parents Should Know: MercyMe holds a unique position in contemporary Christian music, appealing to adults as well as teenagers. They've helped with charity events, including raising money for kids with diabetes.

What MercyMe Says: Lead singer Bart Millard says the band hopes the new album creates "a movement of encouraging people to make a difference in the world, whether it's helping your neighbor or just loving each other."

Discussion Questions: How can acts of kindness change people's lives and surroundings? What are some simple ways you can show kindness to others? Read aloud 1 Thessalonians 5:15. How would daily life be different if everyone followed this advice? Is that a realistic expectation? Why or why not?

FILMWATCH

Movie: *Iron Man 2* (releases May 7)

Genre: Action-Adventure

Rating: PG-13 (for sequences of intense sci-fi action and violence, and some language)

Synopsis: The world now knows that Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) is Iron Man, and with that fame come complications: The U.S. government wants the technology from his suit, a mysterious woman is vying for his attention, and powerful new adversaries are trying to take down the superhero.

Discussion Questions: Why do problems sometimes seem overwhelming? How do you cope with pressure? Why do so many problems exist in the world? Why doesn't God just remove our problems? Read aloud Genesis 39. Think of a time you've seen good come from a problem: Was the end result worth the struggle? Explain. Does God always have lessons to teach us through our problems? Why or why not?



May 2010

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