

*Words Can Work* offers information, communication strategies and the words to help keep kids safe.

**Talk with your child, not at him or her.**

If your child tells you, “I drank because my friends were drinking,” you can ask: “When you say you drank because everyone else did, what do you mean?” Then listen to his or her answer. **Dr. Johnson**

**Before a party, call ahead.**

“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 Sam to go to parties where there’s alcohol.” **Dr. Rauch**

**Ask smart questions and then listen.**

Kyla said: “I’d never do anything like Jenny did.” A good follow-up would be: “I’d love to hear what you’re thinking. Let’s talk about it. Say you’re at a party. Would you drink? Why or why not? Suppose you decide to drink. What could happen next?” **Dr. Johnson**

Read more communication strategies in this *Words Can Work* booklet.



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# Words Can Work: When Talking About Alcohol



A guide for young people, parents, and other caregivers



# About Us

## **WORDS CAN WORK®** **When Talking About Alcohol**

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Jeanne Blake speaks nationally to parents, healthcare  
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about how adults can help kids make healthy decisions.  
She is a consultant to communities and corporations  
on how to implement programs to support effective  
parent/child communication.

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ence dealing with substance abuse, bullying, depression, and  
more. You can also read Jeanne Blake's blog.

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# Words Can Work

When Talking About Alcohol



## Note From the Author

In *Words Can Work: When Talking About Alcohol*, young people, their parents, and other caregivers tell their true stories. Experts offer insight and the words young people and families can use to start and continue lifesaving conversations.

Many young people and adults view underage drinking as a harmless rite of passage. But I've met young people who were seriously injured because they chose to drink. Dreams were shattered. Opportunities were lost.

There are reasons beyond physical safety to talk about alcohol use. Young people often say they drink in response to the pressures they feel growing up. But when teenagers use alcohol to cope with stress, they may not learn to handle their emotions in a healthy way.

These stories – *when discussed in the classroom or with your family* – help you consider the very real consequences of underage drinking.

My thanks to the families who tell their stories and to Paula Rauch, M.D., and Brian Johnson, M.D., who generously share their expertise.

# Binge Drinking

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 were serving margaritas.

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

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.

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.

Will told Cici he was disappointed in her decision to drink. He reminded her that people's bodies slowly develop tolerance for alcohol, which means that when they first begin drinking, they can get drunk easily.

Will talked about the risk of sexual assault. "Girls can get assaulted when they're drunk," he said. "It happens a lot!"

At the same time, Will praised Cici's decision to call for a ride.

"Our kids always have to let us know where they are," Joan said. "When they call, we thank them. I want them to know that we're the good guys."

Joan also reminded Cici that under the influence of alcohol, she was more likely to get into a car with a driver who was drunk. She might also have been less likely to resist using other drugs.

"Even though I made a bad choice," Cici says, "and Mom wasn't happy about it, we could still talk. She never shuts me

## 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>

*“When young people work hard at something ... and are acknowledged for their achievements, their self-esteem is boosted.”*

**Dr. Rauch**

**Dr. Rauch:** When young people work hard at something, improve, and are acknowledged for their achievements, their self-esteem is boosted.

**Dr. Johnson:** Lino recognizes that you have to stay engaged with young people. If they don't want to talk to you, *you* need to talk with *them*. Lino did a great job of talking about the issues he faced growing up. When adults do that, they can encourage

young people to open up. Some parents miss the warning signs. Lino anticipates them. He *knows* young people are going to have a hard time. He catches trouble early.

### **Ilton's words to parents**

“It's hard for kids today because they see alcohol everywhere. On the streets, on billboards, in commercials, all over the place. They just need to be encouraged to look inside and find

something they really like to do besides drinking and being on the street. It's important for parents to support their kids for things they do that are good.”



### **Remember**

**Abusing alcohol can keep you from achieving your goals.**

**See Ilton's story in the DVD  
*Alcohol: True Stories Hosted by Matt Damon*  
available at [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com)**

# Additional Resources

## Recommended Resource

### **Alcohol: True Stories Hosted by Matt Damon (20-minute DVD)**

Four young people tell how alcohol has affected their lives and offer insight into why young people drink. They tell their true stories about drinking and driving, addiction, and how to avoid underage drinking. Includes discussion guide. *For grades five through 12, parents and other caregivers.*

*“This remarkable video about one of America’s most important public health concerns can really make a difference. I have never seen a video that focuses on the subtle but substantial lost opportunities that can result from underage drinking. Alcohol: True Stories fills this void. It will engage young people who have different risk profiles and includes clear messages for parents to help them talk honestly and effectively with their youngsters.”*

**Howard J. Shaffer, Ph.D., C.A.S. Associate Professor,  
Director, Division on Addictions, Harvard Medical School**

## Also available at [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com)

### Words Can Work® Booklets

Words Can Work:  
When Talking About Alcohol

Words Can Work:  
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Words Can Work:  
When Talking About  
Depression

Words Can Work:  
When Talking About Drugs

Words Can Work:  
When Talking With Kids  
About Sexual Health

Words Can Work:  
When Talking About Steroids

### DVDs

Alcohol: True Stories Hosted  
by Matt Damon

Boys on Bullying

Depression: True Stories

Drugs: True Stories

In Our Own Words:  
Teens and AIDS

The Power of Girls:  
Inside and Out

Raising Healthy Kids:  
Families Talk About Sexual  
Health

Steroids: True Stories Hosted  
by Curt Schilling

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## Endnotes

1. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
2. Dr. Henry Wechsler *About Health TV*, Family Health Productions
3. 2008 Monitoring the Future Study
4. *Make a Difference, Talk to Your Child About Alcohol*, NIH Publication No. 06-4314, Revised 2006
5. The Century Council. Sources include: Yankelovich Partners, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, Double Vision, and the KidsPeace Report
6. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
7. Dr. David Satcher, former U.S. Surgeon General
8. Traffic Safety Facts 2008 Data: Young Drivers, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, 2008
9. Adapted from the AAP brochure, “Teens Who Drink and Drive: Reducing the Death Toll” and AAP book *Caring For Your Adolescent: Ages 12 to 21*
10. Adapted from NIAAA, SAMHSA, *Underage Drinking: Why Do Adolescents Drink What Are the Risks, and How Can Underage Drinking Be Prevented?*, Number 67, January 2006
11. Dr. Paula K. Rauch

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