

Whiskey Rebellion

Teach your child to be a healthy drinker

Sure, you're pretty strong on the dad talks. The birds and the bees? No sweat. Drugs? Done and dusted. But alcohol is a different beast altogether. You probably enjoy a good single-malt scotch or a nice gin and tonic, and so does, well, almost every adult your child will ever meet, so lectures about the evils of firewater are going to ring hollow. Work instead toward one simple goal: delaying his or her first drink for as long as possible. A child who starts to drink before age 14 is four times more likely to suffer from alcohol dependence later in life, according to research published in the *Journal of Substance Abuse*. Indeed, what you do and say now can make all the difference as to what kind of drinker he becomes—responsible and healthy, or dangerous and dependent. **AMY LEVIN-EPSTEIN**

1 FORGET MODERATION

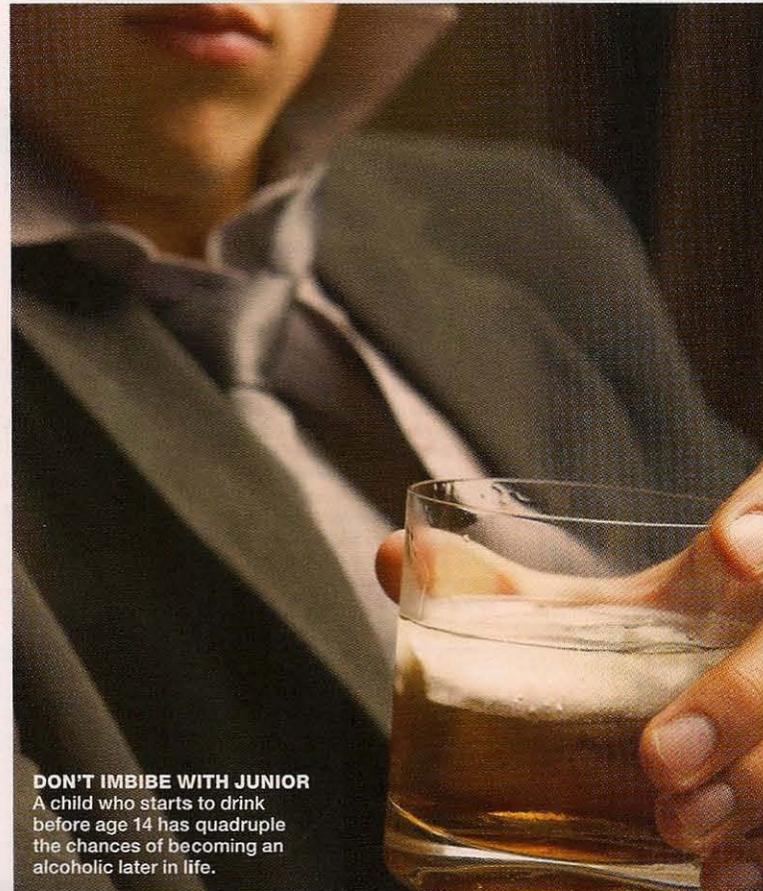
In 1965, the average age of a teen's first drink was 17½, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). By 2003, that number had fallen to age 14, which experts say is disastrous. "Between the ages of 15 and 18, there are major biological changes in the brain," says psychologist Michael Dennis, Ph.D. "Those who start drinking when they're younger than 14 are more likely to become addicted than those who begin drinking at age 18 or older. Every year you can get them to put off that first drink, the better." This means that giving your young teen her first glass of champagne on New Year's Eve may not be teaching her to drink in moderation as was previously thought. "There is little evidence that supports the theory that teaching social drinking early reduces risk," says Dennis. Instead, you may be training her brain for addiction later on.

2 SERVE THE FACTS STRAIGHT UP

If your child is already experimenting with alcohol or spending time with other people who are drinking, your goal is twofold: Besides grounding his ass, you also need to educate him about how to drink so that he doesn't go off the deep end the minute he's out of the house. Tell him how many drinks it'll take to put him over the legal limit (one or two) and how many will raise his blood alcohol content to .35 (usually eight to 12, depending on gender and weight), which is the point at which people can pass out and die. Teach him the importance of sticking with one drink an hour so that his stomach can digest the alcohol, never drinking on an empty stomach, and never driving after drinking or getting into the car of someone who has. If you have a daughter, discuss the effect alcohol has on sexual inhibitions.

3 SHOW HIM HOW IT'S DONE

The single greatest risk factor a child has for becoming an alcoholic is having an alcoholic parent or sibling, not only because of the genetic link but also because of the learned behavior. If your family has a history of drinking problems, tell your child how this puts him at risk. And watch your own consumption. "There's a saying that kids don't always do what we say, but they see what we do," says NIAAA's Mark Willenbring, M.D. So if you typically have more than four drinks in a day, or 14 drinks in a week, you're not only drinking too much for your health but you're also setting a dangerous example for your kid, says Dr. Willenbring.

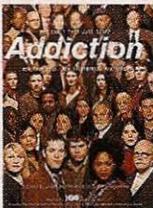


DON'T IMBIBE WITH JUNIOR
A child who starts to drink before age 14 has quadruple the chances of becoming an alcoholic later in life.

4 WATCH FOR DAREDEVILS

If you have a problem child, he could be at greater risk for unsafe behavior—and problems with alcohol—down the road. "Impulsivity is a real risk factor," says Dr. Willenbring. "Risk takers and extroverts are more likely to break rules and hang out with others who break rules." The more severe your child's behavioral or emotional hang-ups, the more likely there will be issues with alcohol. If your child is diagnosed with AD/HD, conduct disorder, depression, or anxiety, you'll want to be even more vigilant when watching for signs of a problem.

For more information, pick up *Addiction* (Rodale, March 2007), by John Hoffman and Susan Froenke, and tune in to HBO's accompanying documentary on March 15.



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THE BOOK OF THE DAD

Tip No. 76



HOW TO INTRODUCE YOUR TODDLER TO YOUR NEWBORN

Prepare your toddler during your wife's pregnancy so he doesn't feel as if his role has been snatched without warning. Show your toddler pictures of himself as a baby. Tell him that he didn't do much when he was first born, but that he grew up to be a fun big kid. Once the baby arrives, spend time alone with your toddler. Point out the benefits of being a big boy: He gets to go on hikes with Dad while the baby stays home and naps. Eventually, he'll come around. *By Heidi Murkoff, author of What to Expect When Mommy's Having a Baby and What to Expect When the New Baby Comes Home (HarperCollins). Send your own parenting tips to BestLifeOnline.com/herodad.*