

DEAR TEACHERS,

Welcome to *Ask, Listen, Learn: Kids and Alcohol Don't Mix*. Teaching your students the facts about underage drinking is crucial. At the same time, it is important for you to know that this could be a sensitive topic for some students, especially if they have family members or friends engaging in risky behaviors with alcohol, or with any history of alcohol abuse. Below are tips developed by a school counselor that can be helpful for you in the classroom if students start asking questions you may not know the answers to:

- 1. Make a plan:** Review the information in the lessons prior to teaching and inform a school counselor on your upcoming unit. Determine the best way you will contact a counselor or administrator if an issue arises at the time of the lesson.
- 2. Communicate:** We know that parents are the greatest influence on their kids' decisions to drink or not to drink, so when you are getting ready to teach this in class, be sure to send home our [Parent Letter](#).
- 3. Create the space:** Create an atmosphere that is safe for students to share their feelings, to know when they can take breaks and to know there is support beyond the classroom. You can have students create "Rules of Respect" or class guidelines for the classroom that everyone follows when difficult topics are taught. Examples of rules can be: There are no dumb questions, everyone needs to respect one another's' points of view, and treat others how you want to be treated.
- 4. Write it down:** If there is ever a moment that the information seems to be difficult for students, take a break. Have them journal about it, have them draw a picture of how they are feeling, or have them write questions on index cards that are concerning them.
- 5. If things get uncomfortable:** Scenarios that can arise will vary, but here are a few examples: A student shares a personal story in class that may be more mature than their peer's experiences; a student becomes visibly uncomfortable with the subject matter; a student becomes disengaged.

- 6. Know when to get assistance:** Contact a counselor (or administrator if counselor is not present) if you find a student needs immediate assistance. If you have a general concern for a student and do not feel immediate assistance is warranted, be sure to communicate your observations of the student with the counselor as soon as possible.
- 7. Know if/when to involve parents:** This is always a difficult area to navigate, especially if a student, whether it is known to you or not, has a parent or close family member who potentially abuses alcohol or other substances. It is always best to involve the counselor if you feel a call home is important. But again, if there are concerns about what is happening at a student's home, turning to the counselor is your best bet. You are a mandated reporter, so this may come in to play if a student reveals any abuse by a caregiver to a student.
- 8. Share:** After you teach the unit, we would love to hear about your experience. Feel free to email AskListenLearn@responsibility.org with tips and tactics you implemented during the lesson, how your kids reacted, anything you found helpful, and feedback in general. You can also engage with us on social media:

 **Twitter:** @AskListenLearn

 **Instagram:** @Ask_Listen_Learn

 **Facebook:** /AskListenLearn

 **YouTube:** /AskListenLearn

Erin O'Malley is the Dean of Student Services and Director of Counseling at Bishop O'Connell High School in Arlington, Virginia. Erin has over 20 years of teaching and counseling experience at the high school and college level, and has special interests in mental health awareness and healthy relationships. She currently sits on Responsibility.org's Educational Advisory Board.



For more info head to [AskListenLearn.org](https://www.responsibility.org)