



Parents and Teens — Open Up!

Do you avoid talking about life decisions, peer pressure, and destructive behavior because ...

- you don't know how to start?
- you don't have time?
- it makes you uncomfortable?
- you don't want a confrontation?
- you don't want to face disappointment?

Despite these fears or feelings, you should have this discussion!

Today, teens frequently face situations in which they could make potentially dangerous decisions, such as underage drinking and impaired driving. Studies have shown that in families with more open communication, teens are less likely to engage in dangerous risk-taking behavior.* SADD, a national school-based organization dedicated to empowering young people to make positive decisions, developed the Contract for Life to assist families in opening lines of communication. While the Contract is primarily a tool for discussing these crucial issues, one of its goals is to have parents and teenagers make a pledge that could be life saving.

This brochure unfolds, like the negotiation process itself. It includes three stages of negotiation:

- **Ice Breakers** - advice for parents and teens to start the talk; who starts may affect the course of the discussion
- **Going Deeper** - tips for both parents and teens about how to take the talk further
- **Commitment** - issues related to making a pledge and signing the Contract for Life

You don't have to follow all the steps laid out here or complete the process in one sitting. If you already talk about these issues in your family, you can even jump straight to the Contract at the end. This brochure, like the Contract itself, is designed as an aid to the critical piece — communication. With regular and respectful conversation about these serious issues, both teens and their parents can achieve their shared goal: a safe and healthy life.

Let's get started! ▶

*Based on a Teens Today study conducted by SADD and Liberty Mutual Group



Opening Lifesaving Lines
Negotiating a Contract for Life



ICE Breakers

Who goes first?

“Why talk?” You have a common interest – the health, safety, and well-being of your family.

SADD believes it is important for teens and their parents to communicate about destructive decisions and the potential role they could play in a teenager's life. However, for a variety of reasons, in many families it is difficult to open a discussion of these issues. The parent or the teen must take the first step.

The goal of this section is for both of you to answer the following two questions:

- Why should we talk about destructive decisions, alcohol, drugs, and SADD's Contract for Life?
- How do we start this conversation?

Think about the following:

- What do destructive decisions mean?
- Think about destructive decisions from the other person's point of view and how you would react.
- What is the most basic thing in life that everyone needs or wants?
- Do you agree that the basic idea of the Contract is to keep teens alive and healthy?
- Does this match up with your most basic needs?
- How would a destructive decision by the teen affect the family?

Talk about it – How to get started:

Find a time when you have the other person's complete attention. If you have hectic schedules, plan a discussion date. There are several options for how to broach the subject. Decide which one works best for you and makes you the most comfortable. You know each other best and can anticipate one another's responses.

For the teen who starts the discussion:

Here are some ideas for how to begin. You could ...

- Tell your parents that you joined SADD and explain what it is.
- Show them the Contract for Life and ask them to take a look at it because you think it has an important point.
- Ask your parents a question such as:
 - What was life like when you were a teen?
 - What do you consider to be destructive decisions?
 - What do you wish most of all for me?
 - What do you think about drinking and driving?
- Tell them about someone you know who made a destructive decision and why you think that it was wrong.
- Explain to your parents that you want to act responsibly and the Contract supports this.
- Gather newspaper or magazine articles that address destructive decisions and leave them with a note indicating that you would like to talk about these topics when they have time.
- Make sure that it is a good time to have the conversation. If your parents are angry and begin to lecture you about drinking or drug use, tell them that it is something you want to discuss and not argue about. Recommend having the conversation when you can all voice your opinions calmly and clearly.
- Is there another trusted adult in your life with whom you can discuss the Contract if your parent is unwilling to discuss it?

For the parents who start the discussion:

Teenage drinking and drug use are serious problems in our society and should be addressed with teens. You should be informed about the facts related to underage drinking and drug use before you sit down with your child. You can find information from the books and Web sites listed at the back of this brochure. To begin, you could:

- Show your teen the Contract for Life and explain that you would like him/her to take a look at it because you think it has an important point.
- Ask your teen about his/her concerns about alcohol, drugs, and drinking and driving.
- Explain your thoughts on alcohol and drugs.
- Tell a story from your youth.
- Tell your teen about a story in the news involving a destructive decision and ask your teen for his/her opinion of the issue.
- Speak as honestly as you feel comfortable about your own drinking habits.

If your teen is disinterested or hostile and refuses to discuss the issues ...

- Tell your teen that it is something that you want to discuss, but you are willing to have the conversation when you can all voice your opinions clearly.
- Let your teen know that you are concerned and you want his/her input on these topics.
- Let your teen know that you are not accusing him/her but that you want to discuss issues that may affect his/her life.
- Ask your teen to listen briefly and have the conversation in small intervals.



Conversation Opener DOs and DON'Ts

- Do**
 - Talk at a convenient time for both of you
 - Express your desire to hear each other's input or views
 - Express your wish to relate to each other
 - Listen carefully
- Don't**
 - Lecture, give unwanted advice, or use scare tactics
 - Interrupt a leisure activity to have a serious talk
 - Make your teen defensive by saying, "Let's talk."
 - Begin the conversation in a moment of anger

Before you unfold this brochure:

- Establish your interests in having a conversation.
- Reach an agreement with each other about the need to have this discussion about drinking, drugs, and the Contract because, as a teen, you want to stay alive and healthy, and as a parent, you want your teen to be alive and healthy.

Note: This booklet is intended for young people and the primary adult or adults in their lives. Out of convenience, we have used the terms "child" and "teen" to refer to a young person, and the term "parents" to refer to a parent, step-parent, grandparent, caregiver or other guardian.



For many, the hard part is over. You have both agreed that health and safety are important and that destructive decisions and the Contract for Life are topics you need to discuss. Now you are ready to delve deeper into these issues. The goal of this section is for you to answer the following questions and communicate your answers to each other.

- How do you think destructive decisions pertain to you as a teenager? To the family?
- As a teen, are you willing to acknowledge that there may be times in your life when you are tempted to make a destructive decision?
- As a parent, are you willing to accept that your teen may be tempted to act this way?
- Are you both willing to recognize and accept that parents will feel upset and disappointed if a destructive decision is made? Are you willing to deal with the consequences?

Think about the following ...

Three of the Contract's issues that teens need to address and acknowledge:

- "I recognize that there are many potentially destructive decisions I face every day."
- "I will do everything in my power to avoid making decisions that will jeopardize my health, my safety and overall well-being or your trust in me."
- "I understand the dangers associated with the use of alcohol and drugs and the destructive behaviors associated with impairment."

Take the time to think of any additional issues that you would like to discuss.



For the teen:

Now, think some more.

The following questions are related to the previously mentioned three quotes.

- What are destructive decisions from your point of view?
- What potentially destructive decisions do you face every day?
- How do you handle these situations? Do you need advice from your parents?
- What do you do to avoid making destructive decisions?
- What do you perceive as the dangers associated with alcohol, drugs, and impairment?
- Do you feel that you have your parents' trust? Why or why not?
- Are you concerned that your parents make destructive decisions?
- Do you think your parents' experiences as teenagers are relevant?

Your teenage years can be very frightening for your parents because they know what dangers could potentially be lurking. They might wonder ...

- if you are drinking or using drugs, or if you will develop a dependency.
- who your friends are and whether or not they are trustworthy.
- if you know the consequences and dangers associated with drinking and drug use.
- if you are underestimating or not anticipating the bad things that can happen.
- how you handle peer pressure.
- if you will be honest with them.
- how to respond to you if you make a decision of which they do not approve.

Talk about it.

- Discuss the three quotes from the Contract with your parents and tell them your thoughts on these remarks.
- Read the list of questions above to your parents and answer the questions as you go along.
- If you feel that your parents engage in destructive behavior, you may want to voice your concern for them as well.
- Ask them how they would react if you were to make a destructive decision.



For the parent:

Now, think some more.

The following questions are related to the previously mentioned three quotes.

- What potentially destructive decisions does your child face every day?
- How does he/she handle these situations and avoid making destructive decisions?
- Does he/she need advice from you or some other responsible adult?
- What does your teen perceive as the dangers associated with alcohol, drugs, or impairment?
- Does your child feel that he/she has your trust? Why or why not?
- Whom does your child turn to for advice and feedback?
- How would you react to your teen if he/she made a destructive decision?
- Are you willing to answer questions about your own habits?
- How much of your behavior as a teen are you willing to discuss?

Talk about it.

- Discuss the three quotes from the Contract with your teen and tell him/her your thoughts on these remarks.
- Read the list of questions above to your child and answer them as you go along.
- Invite your child to ask you questions.
- Explain to your child the legal issues associated with underage drinking, drug use and driving while impaired.
- Tell your child about the physical issues associated with drinking (i.e. losing judgment, getting sick, having hangovers, addiction, inability to focus, etc.).
- Talk about how the adult decision to consume alcohol differs from the teen decision (i.e. it is legal; adult bodies are more developed; adults still need to worry about quantity, hangovers, addictions, and impairment).
- Tell your child of an embarrassing or dangerous situation that happened to you, a close friend, or a relative as a result of drinking or drug use.
- Explain to your child what your expectations are regarding his/her behavior. Children are often reluctant to disappoint parents.
- Ask how he/she would expect you to react to a destructive decision.
- Tell how you think you would react to your child's destructive decision.



REMEMBER TO:

HEAR what the other person has to say and acknowledge your understanding.

SHARE your thoughts about what your life is like, but don't lecture or argue.

LISTEN to each other's concerns.

AGREE not to interrupt the other person.

BE HONEST about your feelings.

UNDERSTAND that the teenage years can be difficult for both of you.

Before you unfold this brochure:

- Recognize and acknowledge that teenagers might be tempted to do dangerous things or make destructive decisions in their lives.
- Acknowledge and accept that destructive decisions will upset parents since the teen's safety and health are at stake.
- Discuss what each other's reactions might be.

KEEP IN MIND AS YOU LISTEN TO EACH OTHER THAT THE MOTIVATING FORCE FOR BOTH OF YOU IS HEALTH AND SAFETY!

Commitment

All Together Now

Commitment All Together Now

Congratulations! You've made it this far.

Now it is time to talk about making commitments related to staying safe and signing the Contract for Life. SADD has found that the Contract's format and the opportunity for signatures lend a degree of formality and weight to this serious discussion.

Keep in mind ...

In order to have a successful negotiation session:

- Remember this is a conversation, not an argument, lecture, or soapbox.
- Express your interests, including your beliefs, feelings, and wishes.
- Listen carefully and do not interrupt.
- Think about the issues from the other person's point of view.
- Realize that negotiating does not mean "giving up" or "giving in."
- Maintain self-control if you hear something that you do not like.
- Don't worry about other parents or teens and what they will think.
- Brainstorm options together and make sure that options provide for mutual gains.
- Make sure that you treat each other fairly and that all parties feel as if they were heard.
- Discuss the future as related to these issues, not the past.

Read the Contract for Life together and discuss its components.

Health, Safety, and Overall Well-Being

Two of the main topics covered in the Contract request that teens avoid destructive decisions and refrain from using alcohol and drugs in order to stay alive and healthy. In reality, how do you accomplish this? One way is to help teens deal with peer pressure and feelings of embarrassment. These feelings can be overwhelming for teens and often influence their actions, leading to destructive behavior. Preparing them to respond to these experiences and emotions is essential.

Role-playing different ways to say no to drugs and alcohol may provide support in this area. Here are some recommendations for what a teenager could say or do. You could ...

- calmly say you're not interested or simply, "No thanks."
- say you have to go home and don't want to smell of alcohol.
- say you don't want to participate in illegal activities.
- say you don't need alcohol or drugs to have fun.
- say good friends wouldn't pressure you to do something you already said you don't want to do.

Parents, you can show your commitment to your teen's health and safety by ...

- letting your teen know that he/she can ask you anything.
- praising your child when he/she is honest with you.
- establishing rules and guidelines to display commitment.
- being a good role model.
- offering alternative activities for your teen and his/her friends to do.
- spending time with your teen.
- listening to your teen's concerns.
- accentuating your child's skills to reinforce self-esteem.

What happens if a destructive decision is made?

How would each of you react if a destructive decision did occur, and what would the consequences for this behavior be? In addition to the legal and physical issues involved, there are also emotional repercussions that involve the family. So, it is important that teens feel secure enough to inform their parents of their actions and that parents are available for their teens and appreciate their teen's honesty. As a parent, how can you create a secure environment that will lead to honesty and openness? Setting rules may help. Here are some recommendations.

- Discuss options for household rules regarding inappropriate behavior.
- Keep in mind age appropriateness.
- Voice your reasons for wanting each rule and its practical use.
- Make sure that the rules are mutually agreeable.
- Accept that there may be occasional "unforeseen circumstances."
- Discuss the consequences for breaking those rules.
- Think about writing out the rules and consequences so that they are visible.

Impaired Driving

Crashes resulting from drinking and driving kill thousands of young people each year and often destroy the hopes and dreams of entire families. This part of the Contract requests that both parents and teen commit to the same concept - never ride with an impaired driver. While this may seem like a simple concept, there are several questions to consider.

For teens specifically:

- How do you determine when a person should not drive?
- What if you make a mistake and take a drink and can't drive?
- What if you are impaired and don't think clearly enough to carry out your pledge?
- How would you feel if you hit someone while under the influence?
- How would you feel if an impaired driver hit you?
- Are you willing to call for a ride despite the fact that it may be embarrassing and your parent may be angry?
- Are you willing to accept the consequences for being in this situation?
- Are you willing to discuss how you came to be in this situation in a calm and caring manner at a later time?
- Are you willing to show your parent appreciation for dropping everything, getting out of bed, and getting dressed to pick you up?

For parents specifically:

- Are you willing to drop everything and pick up your child if he/she calls?
- Are you willing to postpone discussion until all parties can communicate calmly and clearly?
- Are you willing to accept the fact that your child acted responsibly in calling you and praise him/her for that?
- Are you willing to follow through with any consequences that you and your child agreed upon for this behavior?

Can you establish a simple rule that the driver of the vehicle you are in should not have had anything to drink? Remember that anger and punishment are temporary, but car crashes can have permanent repercussions.

Practical Points to Consider

Consider whether you want to agree to add another name to the list of people who can be called to actually pick up the teen. While the idea behind the Contract is to promote safety through honesty, the purpose of this list is two-fold:

- Many teens and parents may feel that the parents won't refrain from showing their anger when they receive a phone call. This, in turn, may prevent the teen from calling if he/she has been drinking or is dependent for a ride on someone who has been drinking.
- The parent may not be available when the teen calls. Another agreed upon, responsible and trustworthy adult who communicates well with you both and who would be willing might also be considered as an option.

Future Communication

You have just spent a considerable amount of time discussing destructive decisions and the merits of the Contract for Life. However, it is a tool that was designed to open ongoing lines of communication and should not be considered to have a beginning and an end. To ensure that the commitment is upheld, frequently revisit the issues that affect teens and their families. How will you manage this? Here are some recommendations:

- Make a commitment to have frequent conversations about your day-to-day activities, scheduling "meetings" if necessary.
- Be sure to communicate before events that may pose the risk of destructive decisions.
- Make sure that you both know that the "doors are always open" if there is a problem.

Are there any additional items that you want to agree upon in order to keep your family healthy and safe? Feel free to add these items to the Contract.

Notes:

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- Wolf, Anthony. *Get Out of My Life*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991.

RESOURCES

- SADD 877-SADD-INC (723-3462) www.sadd.org
- Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Education 202-994-2599 www.wired.gwu.edu/cade
- D.A.R.E. America 800-223-DARE (3273) www.dare-america.com
- MADD 800-GET-MADD (438-6233) www.madd.org
- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information 800-729-6686 www.health.org
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence 212-269-7797 www.ncadd.org
Hope Line 800-NCA-CALL (622-2255)
- Office of National Drug Control Policy 800-666-3332 www.theantidrug.com
www.medicampaign.org
www.freevibe.com
- Partnership for a Drug-Free America 212-922-1560 www.drugfree.org

RECOMMENDED VIDEOS:

- "Alcohol: True Stories" hosted by Matt Damon
Smashed: Toxic Tales of Teens and Alcohol
The Teen Files
"The Truth About Drinking" with Leeza Gibbons
"The Truth About Drugs" with Leeza Gibbons
*Visit www.sadd.org for ordering information.

CONTRACT FOR LIFE

A Foundation for Trust and Caring

This Contract is designed to facilitate communication between young people and their parents about potentially destructive decisions related to alcohol, drugs, peer pressure, and behavior. The issues facing young people today are often too difficult for them to address alone. SADD believes that effective parent-child communication is critically important in helping young adults to make healthy decisions.

YOUNG PERSON

I recognize that there are many potentially destructive decisions I face every day and commit to you that I will do everything in my power to avoid making decisions that will jeopardize my health, my safety and overall well-being, or your trust in me. I understand the dangers associated with the use of alcohol and drugs and the destructive behaviors often associated with impairment.

By signing below, I pledge my best effort to remain free from alcohol and drugs; I agree that I will never drive under the influence; I agree that I will never ride with an impaired driver; and I agree that I will always wear a seat belt.

Finally, I agree to call you if I am ever in a situation that threatens my safety and to communicate with you regularly about issues of importance to both of us.

YOUNG PERSON

PARENT (or Caring Adult)

I am committed to you and to your health and safety. By signing below, I pledge to do everything in my power to understand and communicate with you about the many difficult and potentially destructive decisions you face.

Further, I agree to provide for you safe, sober transportation home if you are ever in a situation that threatens your safety and to defer discussions about that situation until a time when we can both have a discussion in a calm and caring manner.

I also pledge to you that I will not drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs, I will always seek safe, sober transportation home, and I will always wear a seat belt.

PARENT/CARING ADULT



Students Against Destructive Decisions

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Comments and Advice

What teens and parents say

Advice from teens and parents about opening communication ...

"Be straightforward: don't beat around the bush."

"I wish more teens would not be so afraid to talk to their parents. You just have to approach them at the right time."

"When you're not open with your parents, that is when they worry more and that is when they might come out of nowhere and question you. If you're open, it's easier."

"Some parents refuse to acknowledge that their teens may drink. One did, until her son called for a ride, and it saved his life."

"Help your children by getting to know the parents of their friends, and call a parent of a child having a party to make sure that no alcohol will be served."

What teenagers and parents say about the SADD Contract ...

"I was hoping I'd get a break with it. 'You will not argue with me until I am sober in the morning,' that's the part that caught my attention because I thought — my parents would do that?"

"It [discussing the Contract] was positive because it was something concrete to have that had already been an unwritten understanding before."

"Of course they'll do it [drop everything and pick her up if necessary]. They're my parents. They agreed that they would do it under any circumstances."

"My parents were willing to sign it because they have seen the effects [of drunk driving]."

"Some teens are afraid to bring the Contract to their parents because they fear their parents will assume they're drinking."

"One father called his daughter for a ride because he had made a promise not to drink and drive."

"Kids who show the Contract to their parents are saying, 'I'm going to be responsible, but if I'm not, I want your support if I call.'"

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