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FAMILY TALK — MARCH 19
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I. BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

The example you set as a responsible adult is one of the most important ways you can communicate with your children about drinking. This means never providing alcohol to minors or hosting a drinking party for your teens and their friends.

STRATEGIES

- If you drink, make it a normal part of your life, as most adults do. Don't overdo it or place too much emphasis on drinking.
- According to the Roper Youth Report, an overwhelming majority of children, ages 13 to 17, say that their parents have the greatest influence on the decisions they make about drinking. By setting a good example and encouraging dialogue on the subject of drinking from an early age, parents can play a key role in helping their children make good decisions.
- Don't brag about your drinking or make light of drunkenness. And don't drive drunk or tolerate drunk driving by others. Starting with yourself, make driving while intoxicated socially unacceptable behavior.
- If the adults in your home don't drink, you should still discuss alcohol with your children. Talk about drinking in a calm, unemotional manner and explain you've chosen not drink.

II. BE FACTUAL

Teens can make more responsible, informed decisions if you give them the facts about drinking.

STRATEGIES

- Don't try to scare teens about drinking or present alcohol or drinking as evil because it may backfire. That's partly because children have many sources of information, and exaggeration or unfounded stories can damage parent's credibility.

- When you discuss drinking, stress the immediate consequences or effects because young people have the tendency to believe that they are indestructible and will live forever.
- Don't tell your teen "you can't handle it" because that might push them to prove you wrong.
- Start the discussion early. Ages 9 to 11 are ideal for talking about drinking. If your teen doesn't start the discussion, use "learning moments" (such as newspaper article or family occasion) to start the talk.

III. HAVE CLEARLY STATED RULES

Share your opinions and beliefs about drinking, and then make clearly understood rules and consequences if the rules are broken.

STRATEGIES

- Know and express your opinions and beliefs about drinking. Get started by answering these questions:
 - ☛ If you are drinking, what are the positive reasons you have for drinking responsibly?
 - ☛ What are your own family traditions about drinking?
 - ☛ What are your opinions about drinking by others?
 - ☛ What do you feel is appropriate concerning drinking, and what is inappropriate?
 - ☛ What is appropriate behavior for your child?
- Don't talk down to your teens or to give them the idea they're "second-class citizens" without the rights of adults. Explain your reasons for rules and, if possible, make rules together about all sorts of things – chores, homework, and later, parties, dating and driving.
- Set firm punishments for underage drinking. Communicate your disappointment and then enforce your family rules with a punishment that fits the crime.
- Try allowing teens to do something constructive to earn back privileges rather than simply grounding them.

IV. PRACTICE GOOD PARENTING

Build self-esteem, communicate openly about all things, be an active family together and teach responsible decision-making skills.

STRATEGIES

- Help your child feel good about himself by providing praise and encouragement for a job well done. Help your teen discover what makes him special and unique.

- Create an atmosphere of open communication so that your teen always feels comfortable coming to you when they are scared or confused. Let them know that you're really listening to them.
- Be an active family that spends time together. The more time you spend together, the more opportunities your child has to talk openly with you.
- Teach problem-solving and responsible decision-making skills by allowing your child to make more decisions as they age. Teach them to consider the consequences before they act.

V. KNOW YOUR CHILDREN'S FRIENDS & THEIR PARENTS

Be aware of the power of friends to influence your children. Also, learning about other families' values and rules will help you monitor your own children.

STRATEGIES

- You can't choose your child's friends, but you can encourage your teens to talk about their friends with you, as well as how their friends make them feel and whether their friends influence their behavior.
- Learn about your teen's friends and what they like to do together. Include close friends in your family's activities.
- Teach your teen specific ways to say "No" to peer pressure to drink, such as "No, thanks. It's not cool to drink or get drunk" or "It's not worth being grounded if my parents find out – and they find out everything!"

VI. GET HELP IF YOU NEED IT

If you think a sudden change in your child's behavior may be related to drinking, seek professional advice immediately. Talk to your teen's pediatrician or school officials, your pastor or priest, or a close friend whose advice you trust.

STRATEGIES

- Watch for signs of alcohol abuse, such as:
 - ☛ A significant decrease in school performance, such as low grades, failed exams or increased absenteeism.
 - ☛ Withdrawal from family activities, secretiveness, lying, unwillingness to communicate.
 - ☛ Depression, loss of interest in usual hobbies or activities, excessive mood swings.
 - ☛ A new set of friends who you feel may be inclined to drink alcohol beverages.
 - ☛ Financial problems or unexplained accidents or injuries.

- Make sure your teen knows when she should return home from an evening out. Stay up and greet your teen when he or she comes home. That action says you care and are paying attention to what's happening.
- Before you go out of town and leave a teen in charge for the weekend, consider very carefully whether he or she can handle the responsibility. Make it clear that throwing a party while you're gone is not an option.
- Teen parties should have adult chaperones, definite time limits, invitation lists and no gate-crashers. Do not let your teen attend a party that doesn't meet these standards. Many schools host alcohol-free parties after events, such as homecoming, prom and graduation to provide teens with fun activities.
- When your teen receives a driver's license, consider letting her drive initially only during daylight hours for short distances or to specific places. As she becomes more experienced, gradually increase the range and hours to include nighttime driving and, eventually, full driving privileges.

SAMPLE SCENARIOS

The Restaurant

A family is eating out at a restaurant. The waiter is serving drinks: a soft drink for the 9-year-old daughter and a beer each for Mom and Dad.

Daughter: Dad, my teacher says people shouldn't drink and drive. Who's going to drive home since you and Mom are having a beer?

Father: I'll still be able to drive home. Your mom and I are having a beer with our pizza, but we would never drink more than we should and drive. We know our limits.

Mother: Your dad's right. It's fine for adults to drink, as long as they use common sense.

Daughter: But why do you drink at all? Our teacher says people can get drunk and hurt other people when they drink and drive.

Father: Like lots of people, your mom and I enjoy having a beer, but some grown-ups choose not to drink, and that's OK, too.

Unfortunately, a few people make bad decisions and drink too much. I'm sure that's what your teacher was talking about.

Mother: That's why it's important to remember when you grow up, if you want to drink, be sensible about it and don't overdo it.

The Football Game

A father and his 10-year-old son are watching a Sunday afternoon football game on television. The father is drinking a beer, and the son has a soft drink. It's half-time.

Son: Dad, why is it OK for grown-ups to drink but not kids?

Father: Well, for one thing, it's against the law. Plus, adults' bodies are fully grown so they can handle drinking, but kids' bodies can't. Even a small amount of alcohol can be bad for kids.

Son: Yeah, we studied how alcohol affects you in school. But why do some grown-ups drink?

Father: I like beer, and it's something you may like when you're an adult. But I never drink a lot – some people make too big a deal about drinking. I usually have a couple of beers when I'm having fun. Does that make sense?

Son: Sure. Hey, half-time's almost over.

Kitchen Talk

A mother and her 11-year-old son are talking before dinner.

Son: You know my friends Mark and Alex were talking about drinking the other day at school.

Mother: Oh? What did they say?

Son: They told me they sneaked liquor from Mark's folks' bar and drank it. They asked me if I wanted to do it next time.

Mother: So, what did you tell them?

Son: Well, the bell rang, so we had to go to class. But I told Mark I'd walk home with him after basketball practice tomorrow, and I bet he'll ask me again. I don't want them to think I'm chicken.

Mother: It sounds as though Mark and Alex are just trying to act grown-up. But doing something you're not supposed to isn't very grown-up, is it?

Son: I guess not. But how can I say no?

Mother: Well, what about saying, "No, thanks. I've got better things to do." Then maybe you could suggest something else – perhaps, "Let's go play basketball."

Son: Yeah, or maybe we could play video games?

Mother: That sounds good, too. You know, it's important not to compromise your values for the sake of being "one of the gang." Let me know what happens, OK?

Party Check

A parent calls to ask about the party his son, Jeff, will be attending at another teen's house. The phone rings...

Marcus: Hi, Jim! It's Marcus Smith. How's it going?

Jim: Great, Marcus. How's the family?

Marcus: Just fine. I was calling to ask about the party Amy's having this weekend. Jeff's planning on going, so I wanted to make sure you and Nancy were going to be around.

Jim: Marcus, I know where you're coming from. I trust our kids, but you can't be sure all the kids are as responsible as Amy and Jeff. We'll probably stay upstairs most of the evening, but we'll walk through occasionally to keep a close eye on the kids. We'll probably have to restock the food several times – you know how those kids eat!

Marcus: I hear that! I was just a little concerned because Jeff told us what he heard at school about the party last weekend where Kristen's parents bought a keg for the kids. I just don't understand that.

Jim: Yeah, it doesn't make a lot of sense – it's illegal, and besides, kids can't handle drinking. Don't worry, Marcus. Nothing like that's going to happen at Amy's party.

Marcus: Thanks, Jim! Tell Nancy we said hello... we'll talk to you later...

10 Fun Ways To Say “No”

It’s not easy for your teen or pre-teen to say “No” when friends urge him or her to join in and drink. Sometimes parents have to help by putting the words into their youngsters’ mouths.

The next time you talk to your son or daughter about drinking being illegal and inappropriate for their age, put a little humor into the conversation. Share these fun ideas with your teen or pre-teen:

- “No thanks. I don’t want to take the chance. My Mom has a nose like an elephant and she can smell alcohol on me a mile away.”
- “No thanks. I’m driving after I leave here.”
- “I’m trying out for the team and if the coach finds out I’m a goner.”
- “You’re really cool to share, but, no thanks.”
- “No thanks; I’ve tried it and all it does for me is put me to sleep.”
- “Me chicken? Do you see any feathers on me?”
- “Not now. I’m already in enough trouble with my parents.”
- “No thanks...there must be a good reason why they say you have to be older to drink so I think I’ll just wait.”
- “Right now, I’m totally hungry not thirsty, so I think I’ll just grab some munchies.”
- “No thanks, maybe later. Right now a soda would taste really great.”

Now ask your pre-teen or teenager to add a few of his own ideas to the list. Practice these fun peer-pressure busters regularly so that your child is prepared.