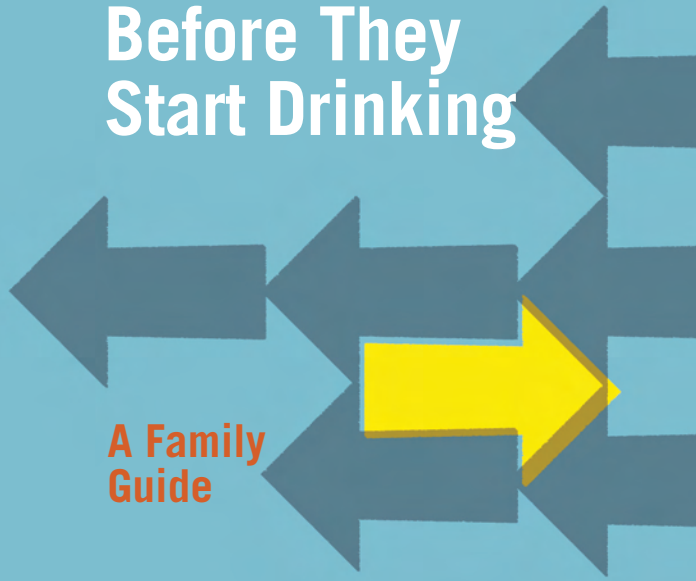
Start Talking Before They Start Drinking



A Family Guide

A Life in the Community for Everyone
SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Ad Council

prevention

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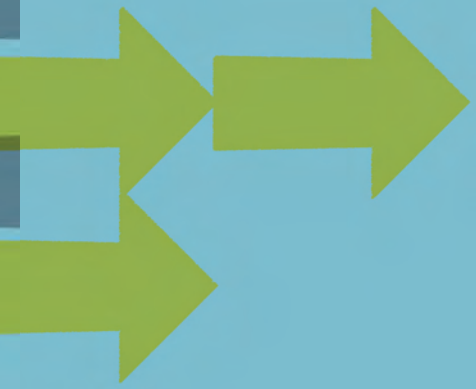
You Are the Most Powerful Influence on Your Child's Behavior



The negative consequences of underage drinking are more widespread and serious than previously known. A growing body of research shows that alcohol can change the way the brain works and the way it's wired, and may have consequences reaching far beyond adolescence. Many more dangers of underage drinking are immediate, including alcohol poisoning, sexual and physical assault, and motor vehicle crashes. Underage drinking is a serious problem, with roots deep in our culture.

You can help protect your children from the risks associated with drinking by maintaining open communication and expressing a clear, consistent message that underage alcohol use is unacceptable. Building a close relationship with your children will increase the likelihood they come to you for help in making decisions that impact their health and well-being.

This guide provides facts and practical advice on how to talk with your children about underage drinking. It helps you create household rules to support your values. Society gives children mixed messages about alcohol. Make sure that your children get their information from the best resource available ➡ you.

The Surgeon General's Call to Action

The Surgeon General is the Nation's top doctor and public health officer. The President of the United States appoints the Surgeon General to help protect and promote the health of the Nation. The Surgeon General lets people across the country know the latest news on how to get healthy and stay healthy. Because of emerging new knowledge about the number of children who drink, how much they drink and what happens when they drink, the Surgeon General issued a Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking. It explains why underage alcohol use is a major public health and safety issue. Rates of death and injury nearly triple between the early teen years and early adult life. Underage drinking contributes to this increase and that's why ending teen alcohol use can help save lives.

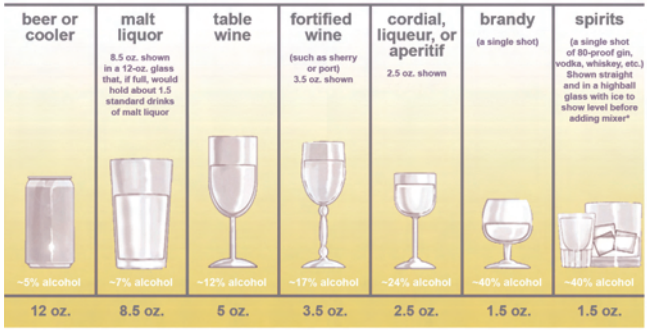
This brochure incorporates the latest information from the Call to Action, and will give you the knowledge and tools you need to take action against underage drinking.

What You Need to Know

statistics → *decision making*

actions have consequences →

A Standard Drink



*Note: It can be difficult to estimate the number of standard drinks served in a single mixed drink made with hard liquor. Depending on factors, such as type of spirits and the recipe, one mixed drink can contain from one to three or more standard drinks.

A standard drink is any drink that contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol. This is the amount usually found in:

> One 12-ounce beer

> One 4–5-ounce glass of wine

> One 1.5-ounce shot of 80 proof liquor

But not all drinks are standard drinks. Different drinks often have different amounts of alcohol. Mixed drinks may contain more than one shot of liquor, and different beers or wines may not have the same alcohol in them, even when the drinks are the same size. For example, some beers and beer products, like "ice" beers, and malt liquors, and some wines, have more alcohol than others.

Remember, the legal drinking age is 21 and underage drinking can be a threat to health and development.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

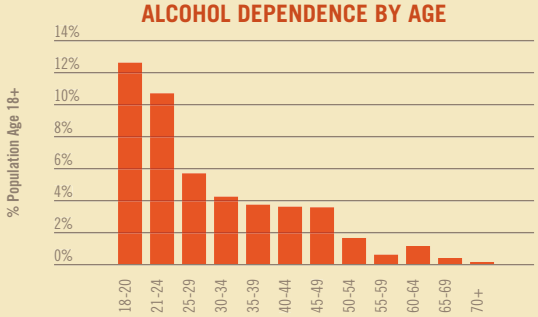
Underage Drinking

> As they grow older, the chance that young people will use alcohol grows. Approximately 22.1 percent of 12–14 year olds say they have used alcohol at least once. By age 15–17 alcohol use more than doubles. And by 18–20 just over 80 percent have had at least one drink (NSDUH).[1]

> A majority of underage drinkers in 2006 reported that when they last used alcohol they were either in someone else's home (53.4 percent) or their own home (30.3 percent) (NSDUH).[2]

> When young people drink, they tend to drink a lot at one time. Past month alcohol users aged 12 to 20 drank on an average of 5.9 days in the past month and consumed and average of 4.9 drinks per day on the days they drank in the past month (NSDUH).[3]

> Among all underage current drinkers, 31.0 percent paid for the alcohol last time they drank, including 9.3 percent who purchased the alcohol themselves and 21.6 percent who gave money to someone else to purchase it. The remaining 69 percent of underage drinkers did not pay for the alcohol on their last drinking occasion (NSDUH).[4]



The prevalence of alcohol dependence is highest in the 18–20 and 21–24 year old groups. These kids don't just party.[5]

Underage Drinking

- Almost 1 in 10 (9.4 percent) of persons aged 12 to 20 met the criteria for a diagnosable alcohol use disorder (NSDUH).[6]
- Studies show an association between early drinking to heavy alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems in adulthood. In fact, i**ndividuals who begin drinking alcohol before the age of 15 are about 7 times more likely than those who start after age 21 to develop alcohol problems (NSDUH).**[7]
- More young people use alcohol than use tobacco or illicit drugs.[8]
- Alcohol use kills more children than all illegal drugs combined.[9]

Alcohol and Judgement

The teenage brain is still developing. Alcohol can impair the parts of the brain that control the following:

- Motor coordination. This includes the ability to walk or drive.
- Impulse control. Drinking lowers inhibitions and increases the chances that a person will do something that they will regret when they are sober.
- Memory. Impaired recollection and even blackouts can occur when too much alcohol has been consumed.
- Judgement and decision making capacity. Drinking may lead young people to engage in risky behaviors that can result in illness, injury, and even death.[10]

Risks

Alcohol use among youth is strongly correlated with violence, risky sexual behavior, poor academic performance and other harmful behaviors.[11]

VIOLENCE

> Children who start drinking before age 15 are 12 times more likely to be injured while under the influence of alcohol and 10 times more likely to be in a fight after drinking, compared with those who wait until they are 21.[12]

SEXUAL ACTIVITY

> Underage drinking plays a significant role in risky sexual behavior, including unwanted, unintended, and unprotected sexual activity, and sex with multiple partners. Such behavior increases the risk for unplanned pregnancy and for contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including infection with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.[13,14]

SCHOOL

> Teens who use alcohol have higher rates of academic problems and poor performance than non-drinkers.[15]

> Among eighth-graders, higher truancy rates are associated with greater rates of alcohol use in the past month.[16]

ILLICIT DRUG USE

> More than 67% of young people who start drinking before the age of 15 will try an illicit drug. Children who drink are 7.5 times more likely to use any illicit drug, more than 22 times more likely to use marijuana, and 50 times more likely to use cocaine than children who never drink.[17]

DEATH AND INJURY

> Approximately 5,000 people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking each year. This includes death from car crashes, homicides, suicide, as well as from injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings.[18]

> When young people drink and get into a car, they tend to make poor decisions that impact their safety.[19]

> Traffic crashes are the number one killer of teens and over one-third of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related.[20]

The Teen Years

A Time of Many Changes

The teen years are a time of particular vulnerability to alcohol use and its consequences. It is also a time when the developing brain may be particularly susceptible to long-term negative effects from alcohol use.

Preventing underage alcohol use must take into account the complex forces and factors that shape how an adolescent will respond to the availability of alcohol in different situations at different times across the span of adolescents. For example:

> Boys physically become young men and girls become young women.

> Young people move from elementary to middle school and then to high school. Academic responsibilities and expectations increase.

> Teens spend less time with their parents. They spend more time alone or with friends. They also like to stay up later and sleep in.

> Teens worry more about friendship and social groups. And they have growing romantic and sexual interests.

> The desire for adventure, excitement, and action increases. That's why many young people want to take more chances, try new things, and be more independent.

All these things are part of healthy adolescent development; they can also increase the risk for alcohol use. Helping your child to have the right skills to refuse to do something he or she has decided not to do is discussed in the next part of this guide.

Remember, teens with emotional, behavior or family problems are at higher risk for alcohol use. And if anyone in the family has a drinking problem, it can affect the entire family. It also may affect a teen's choices about drinking.

Family Influence

"We must create an environment that discourages underage drinking and supports parents' efforts to provide their children with messages about growing up safe and healthy."

Rear Admiral Steven K. Galson, M.D., M.P.H.,
Acting Surgeon General

Most 6-year-olds know that alcohol is only for adults. However, between ages 9 and 13, youth begin to think that alcohol use is okay. That's why it's never too early to start talking with young people about the dangers of underage drinking.

Teens say that they rely on adults in their lives more than anyone else to help them make tough decisions and to provide good advice.

The US Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend moderate drinking for adults who choose to drink. Moderate drinking is defined by the Dietary Guidelines as up to two drinks a day for men and one for women. According to epidemiologic research, men who drink more than 4 standard drinks in a day (or more than 14 per week) and women who drink more than 3 in a day (or more than 7 per week) are at increased risk for alcohol-related problems.

You have more influence over your children than you may realize. Kids spend a lot of time with friends, television, music and magazines. But they are also tuned in to you. Your words and actions impact them in many ways every day.

> Research studies indicate that children are less likely to drink when their parents are involved in their lives and when they and their parents report feeling close to each other.[21]

> You can influence your children's behavior by observing the rules of a moderate drinker or by not drinking.[22]

> Your older children also influence their younger brothers and sisters. Older siblings' alcohol use can influence the alcohol use of younger siblings in the family, particularly for same sex siblings.[23]

What You Need to Say

spell it out

thoughts and feelings

alcoholism

Alcohol and Underage Drinking

Your children need information to make good decisions. Don't wait until a problem arises to talk to them about drinking alcohol. Be sure to tell your child:

THE BODY[24]

> A single drink of alcohol can affect you.

> Alcohol passes through the lining of the stomach into the bloodstream. It irritates the stomach lining, which can make a person feel sick. If drinking continues, the person may vomit.

> Alcohol moves through the bloodstream to every organ in the body, including the brain.

> Once alcohol enters the brain, it changes the way a person behaves. Alcohol can make people do things they do not want to do.

> As a person drinks more alcohol, the ability to make decisions is affected. The drinker also may lose balance and be unable to see or speak clearly. The more alcohol a person drinks, the worse the effects can be.

> Alcohol can have lasting effects on the brain, impairing how a person learns, thinks, and remembers.

> Alcohol can kill. When a person drinks too much alcohol in a very short period, alcohol poisoning can occur. Breathing gets difficult. A person can vomit, pass out, or even die.

> Some people get addicted to alcohol. They drink more and more as they get used to the alcohol. But they can stop and recover.

PEERS

> Children often think that other people their age are drinking regularly, but most are not.[25]

> Alcohol can hurt your child—even if he or she is not the one drinking. If your child is around people who are drinking, he or she has an increased risk of being seriously injured or affected by violence. At the very least, your child may have to deal with someone who is sick, out of control, or unable to take care of themselves.[26]

> As children get older, some of their friends may start drinking, and may get into trouble from drinking too much. Tell your child that there is help for people who have alcohol problems. It is OK to get help.

THE LAW

> It is illegal for anyone to buy alcohol until 21 years of age.

> Even one drink can cause a person to fail a breath test. In some states, people under age 21 who have been drinking can have their driver's license suspended, be subject to a heavy fine, or have their car permanently taken away.[27]

Your Family Beliefs & History Around Alcohol

Discuss your personal beliefs with your child. Sharing your values and family history around alcohol will create an environment of trust and understanding.

IF YOU DRINK

> Explain your reasons for drinking responsibly and in moderation.

> Tell your children that some people should not drink alcoholic beverages at all. These include:[28]

- Children and adolescents.
- Individuals of any age who cannot restrict their drinking to moderate levels. This is a special concern for recovering alcoholics and people whose family members have alcohol problems.
- Women who are trying to conceive or who are pregnant.
- People who plan to drive or take part in activities that require attention or skill.
- People using prescription and/or over-the counter medications that should not be used in combination with alcohol.

> Be clear that you do not want your children to drink alcohol until they are 21 years old.

> When they are 21, if they decide to drink, they should do in moderation.

IF YOU DON'T DRINK

> Explain your reasons for not drinking, whether they are religious, health related, or due to family history.

> Encourage your children to talk with you if they have questions about why you choose not to drink.

> Be clear that you do not want them to drink alcohol.

> Explain that when they are 21, if they should decide to drink, they should do so in moderation.

Your Family Beliefs & History Around Alcohol

IF YOU DRANK UNDERAGE

Parents need to think carefully about how to answer their children's questions about their own alcohol use as teens.

If a parent was an underage drinker, be honest.

Don't let your past stop you from conversing with your child about underage alcohol use. The value of face-to-face discussions with your child cannot be overestimated.

Acknowledge that it was risky. Make a distinction between adolescent use and adult use and emphasize that we know even more now about the risks than ever before.

Explain how and why your opinions of underage drinking have changed.

IF SOMEONE IN THE FAMILY DRINKS TOO MUCH OR IS IN RECOVERY

If your family has a history of alcoholism, your children need to know that they are at a greater risk for problem drinking.

> Discuss what drinking responsibly means, and that some people are unable to drink alcohol at all without drinking to excess.

> Explain that alcoholism is a progressive disease that is a combination of physical addiction and mental obsession with drinking.

> Communicate the importance of abstaining from alcohol. Tell your children that they need to delay drinking for as long as possible and recommend that they not drink at all. Explain that the older they are before they take a drink, the lower the chances that they will have problems with alcohol.

> Let your children know that drinking under the legal age of 21 is a major risk for people with a family history of alcohol.

> Inform them that there are successful treatment options for people who drink and develop problems with alcohol, and that you support family members who are in recovery.

Your Family Beliefs & History Around Alcohol

HELP IS AVAILABLE

> **SAMHSA National Drug Information Treatment and Referral Hotline**
800-662-HELP (4357) • www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Information, support, treatment options, and referrals to local rehab centers for any drug or alcohol problem. Operates 24 hours, seven days a week.

> **Alateen**
800-344-2666 • al-anon.alateen.org

Alateen is a recovery program for young people which helps families and friends of alcoholics recover from the effects of living with a problem drinker.

> **National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA)**
888-554-COAS • nacoa.org

NACoA's mission is to advocate for all children and families affected by alcoholism and other drug dependencies.

What You Need to Do

be consistent

get involved

Take Action

There are six actions you can take today to help keep your child alcohol free.

TALK EARLY AND OFTEN WITH YOUR CHILD

> Establish and maintain an open line of communication.

> Get into the habit of talking with your child every day. This will make it easier for you to have conversations about serious subjects when necessary.

GET INVOLVED

> Talking with your child about his or her activities opens up an opportunity for you to share your interests and values.

> Young people are much less likely to have mental health and substance abuse problems when they have positive activities to do and when caring adults are involved in their lives.

BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

> Think about what you say and how you act in front of your child. Your own actions are the most powerful indicator to your children of what is appropriate and acceptable in your family.

> Do not take part in illegal, unhealthy, or dangerous practices related to alcohol, tobacco, or drugs or your child may believe that these practices are OK no matter what you say.

Be aware of what is going on in your home. Two out of three teens aged 13–18 said it is easy to get alcohol from their own homes without their parents knowing it.[29]

TEACH KIDS TO CHOOSE FRIENDS WISELY

> Teach your child how to form positive relationships.

> Help your child to understand what qualities to look for in a friend.

MONITOR YOUR CHILD'S ACTIVITIES

> Know where your children are and get acquainted with their friends.

> Limit the amount of time your children spend without an adult being present. Unsupervised children have more opportunities to experiment with risky behaviors, including the use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs, and they may start substance abuse at earlier ages.

SET RULES

> Make clear, sensible rules for your child and enforce them with consistency and appropriate consequences.

> Following these rules can help protect your child's physical safety and mental well-being, which can lower his or her risk for substance abuse problems.

Set Clear Rules About Alcohol

Set clear rules about alcohol.

BE SPECIFIC

> Tell your children what the law is, what your household rules are, and what behavior you expect. For example, "Alcohol is for adults. Do not drink alcohol until you are 21. Our family follows the law."

BE CONSISTENT

> Be sure your children understand that the rules are maintained at all times, and that the rules hold true even at other people's houses. Follow your own rules.

BE REASONABLE

> Don't change the rules in mid-stream or add new consequences without talking to your children. Avoid unrealistic threats.

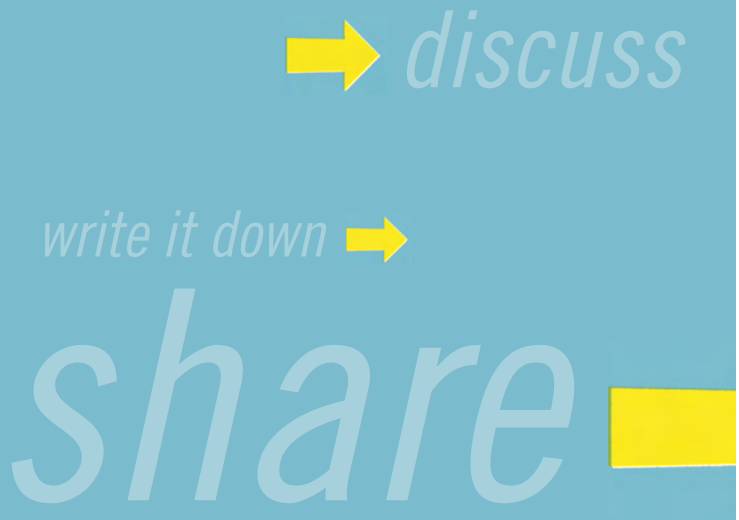
RECOGNIZE GOOD BEHAVIOR

> Always let your children know how pleased you are when they respect the rules of the household.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

> Write out your most important family rules and post them clearly where they are seen often by everyone in the family. Then review the rules regularly with your family on your child's birthday or at the beginning of the school year.

Activities



Play Reporter

Use these questions to interview your child and then let your child interview you.

Let your child's questions and answers lead you into a longer conversation. Remember to change the questions as needed based on your child's age. For example, you might ask a teenager about his or her future goals, but you might ask a younger child, "What do you want to be when you grow up? Why?" Be sure to practice active listening by showing interest in what your child says; this will validate your child's feelings. If your child says something you don't agree with, respond positively and try to find a constructive answer. Make sure your child knows your beliefs.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What three words would you use to describe yourself? To describe me?
2. Who are some of your role models? What do you admire about these people?
3. What scares or concerns you? What makes you happy?
4. What are your future goals?
5. How would drinking alcohol get in the way of your future goals?
6. What would you do if you were offered alcohol at a party?
7. What would you do if the person responsible for driving you has been drinking alcohol?
8. What would you really like to ask me but are too afraid to talk about?

Think/Say/Feel

PARENTS

Use the enclosed pages to imagine that you are having a dialog with your child. This exercise will prepare you to speak openly with your child and will help you to anticipate his or her reaction to your ideas. Be as realistic as possible.

> Write down what you would think, say, and feel while having a conversation about underage drinking with your child.

> Now write down what you imagine your child is going to think, say and feel.

> Share your answers with your child.

Activity Inside Flap ▸

Think/Say/Feel

CHILDREN

Talking with your parents about underage drinking can be challenging. This exercise will prepare you to speak openly to your mom or dad about underage drinking and will help you to anticipate what your parent's reaction might be. Be as realistic as possible.

> Write down what you would think, say, and feel while having a conversation about underage drinking with your parent.

> Now write down what you imagine your mom or dad is going to think, say and feel.

> Share your answers with your parent.

◂ *Activity Inside Flap*

Family Rules

Many families give mixed messages to their children about underage drinking. This exercise will help you share your beliefs and family values about alcohol use and allow you to create a set of rules. Are there differences between your spoken and unspoken rules about underage drinking? Are there differences between your perception of these rules and your child's perception? How can you eliminate any inconsistencies? Write out your answers to these questions independently and then discuss them together.

WHAT THE PARENT THINKS:

Spoken Rule: _____

_____

Unspoken Rule: _____

_____

WHAT THE CHILD THINKS:

Spoken Rule: _____

_____

Unspoken Rule: _____

_____

NOW WRITE A CLEAR SET OF FAMILY RULES ABOUT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION.

What the law is: _____

_____

What our family's rule is on the use of alcohol: _____

_____

What behavior we expect: _____

_____

Conclusion

By learning more about how underage drinking affects a teen's growing body and brain, family and other adults in the community can better help protect youth from the dangers of underage drinking. Family and caring adults in the community can help teens choose not to drink.

Let your children know how important they are to you. Be honest with them about the facts and consequences of underage drinking. Your ongoing involvement, care, and concern will help your children to stay safe.

Support your children's future — keep them alcohol free.

Resources

www.stopalcoholabuse.gov

A comprehensive portal of Federal resources for information on underage drinking and ideas for combating this issue. People interested in underage drinking prevention—including parents, educators, community-based organizations, and youth—will find a wealth of valuable information here. stopalcoholabuse.gov is supported by the Federal Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Prevention of Underage Drinking (ICCPUD).

www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Human Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Family.samhsa.gov

A public education Web site, developed to support the efforts of parents and other caring adults to promote mental health and prevent the use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs among 7– to 18-year-olds.

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

www.ncadi.samhsa.gov

NCADI is the Nation's one-stop resource for information about substance abuse prevention and addiction treatment.

The Anti-Drug

www.theantidrug.com

TheAntiDrug.com serves as a drug prevention information center, and a supportive community for parents to interact and learn from each other.

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

www.niaaa.nih.gov

NIAAA provides leadership in the national effort to reduce alcohol-related problems by conducting and supporting research; coordinating and collaborating with other research institutes and Federal Programs; and translating and disseminating research findings to health care providers, researchers, policymakers, and the public on alcohol-related issues

Sites for Kids

www.freevibe.com

www.nacoa.org

www.al-anon.alateen.org

www.thecoolspot.gov

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What you're…

THINKING:

SAYING:

FEELING:

What your child is…

THINKING:

SAYING:

FEELING:

What you're…

THINKING:

SAYING:

FEELING:

What your parent is…

THINKING:

SAYING:

FEELING: