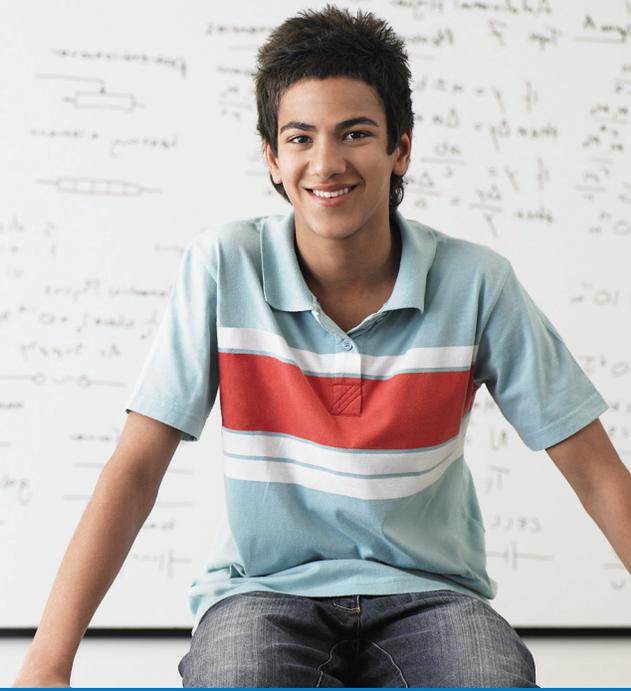


STARTING THE SCHOOL YEAR:

Reducing the Risk of Underage Drinking



Research has shown a key risk period for underage drinking or drug use is during times of transition. While the start of school may bring about new experiences and new friends, it may also bring about stress, anxiety, or unfamiliar social situations. You can help your child by engaging in meaningful conversation about what to expect and how to confront situations when they become uncomfortable or dangerous.

Try these helpful tips to help your child prepare for the new school year:



Ease into routine

Transitioning from summer to a school schedule can be challenging, so having a set bedtime or curfew is crucial for making mornings successful. Practice the routine a few days in advance by setting the alarm clock, going through the morning routine, and even walking to school or the bus stop.



Stock up

Taking your child school supply shopping can be a fun and exciting way for your child to eliminate any stressors that come with entering a new classroom. Establish guidelines by following the list, but also allow for a few fun items like a unique notebook or set of colored pens.



Get acquainted

For kids, one of the biggest back-to-school stressors is fear of whether they will like their teacher. Another is being late or not knowing where to go. To help alleviate stress, take advantage of back-to-school night or set an appointment to meet your child's teachers. Find the different classrooms, or if your child is in middle or high school, walk through their class schedule room by room.



Encourage involvement

Encourage your child to participate in structured after-school programs such as sports, scouts, music, and dance. Activities like this will provide them an opportunity to meet other kids with similar interests and gain self-confidence by developing skills and talents. They will also give your child something constructive to do after school, because this time is often when children first experiment with alcohol or drugs, especially if they are unsupervised.



Connect with friends (and their parents)

Whether your child has the same friends year after year, or is making many new ones, it's important for you to get to know them and their parents. It's a great way to gain insight as to whether they'll remain safe when you're not around. Discuss ways to turn down peer pressure should your child encounter an uncomfortable situation.



Set limits

This new school year is a perfect time to remind your child of your household rules, expectations, and consequences for school, friends, and risky behaviors. Discuss local events or stories in the newspaper to support your reasoning for the limits you've set and make it an ongoing conversation.



Stay engaged

The support you provide in your child's life is crucial to keeping them safe and confident. Participate in school events, support your child in their extracurricular activities, or simply sit down with them while they're doing homework. This engagement can make a big impact in their success.



Educate yourself

Educate yourself about alcohol and drugs, especially underage drinking laws in North Dakota, current trends in your community, and symptoms of substance abuse.

Visit parentslead.org/what-are-laws-nd and parentslead.org/my-sondaughter-using to learn more.



Keep talking

No matter how hard it might be to get the details, keep talking to your child about school, friends, and activities. Keep asking questions, listen without judgement, and provide information along the way. This consistency is key to ensuring your child knows you love and support them no matter what.