



It's Up to Us[®]

to Create a Healthy & Supportive San Diego

A bulletin regarding the connection between mental health and alcohol use



Edition 32

About the Campaign

During 2020, health challenges, long periods of isolation and economic stressors caused many San Diegans to deal with mental health issues. To help our community, It's Up to Us is working hard to encourage conversations about mental health challenges and offer support to all locals.

However, as we move forward in 2021, pandemic hardships continue to impact our residents. We have seen a rise in drinking in San Diego and across the country¹ as more people use alcohol to deal with stress, anxiety and other mental health challenges². In San Diego, alcohol is even easier to access through extended alcohol-to-go policies.³ Blood-alcohol levels have also risen this year and, as a result of increased drinking, the county has experienced 35 DUI fatalities in 2021. This is the highest number recorded in 20 years⁴.

Coping with alcohol can often make things worse, not better. To help, the It's Up to Us campaign is striving to bring awareness and support to San Diegans experiencing mental health challenges and mild, moderate or severe alcohol use disorder. By offering a variety of modern resources we aim to help people understand how alcohol can negatively impact mental health in order to reduce stigma and inspire wellness with an emphasis on the most at-risk populations.

This campaign is developed through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, and supports the County's *Live Well San Diego* plan to promote a community that is healthy, safe and thriving.

¹ Pollard, M. S., Tucker, J. S., & Green, H. D. (2020). Changes in adult alcohol use and consequences during the COVID-19 pandemic in the US. *JAMA Network Open*, 3(9). <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.22942>

² Sugarman, D. E., & Greenfield, S. F. (2020). Alcohol and covid-19: How do we respond to this growing public health crisis? *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 36(1), 214–215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-020-06321-z>

³ Thompson, D. (2021, October 8). California extends cocktails-to-go and outdoor dining rules. *Tribune*. Retrieved October 13, 2021, from <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/california/story/2021-10-08/california-extends-cocktails-to-go-and-outdoor-dining-rules>.

⁴ Medina, B. (2021, October 13). Fatal DUIs Continue to Spike. *DA NewsCenter*. Retrieved October 14, 2021, from <https://danewscenter.com/news/fatal-duis-continue-to-spike/>.

Read Up: How Drinking Alcohol Can Impact Your Mental Health

Although it seems like alcohol could be a solution to help cope, the truth is it can increase anxiety and cause a strain on your personal relationships.

Some alcohol use may be okay, but in some cases, that after-work wine or beer could be making issues worse. Even skipping exercising in the morning and going to work when you don't feel great could be due to drinking.

You may not notice how alcohol affects you, but your loved ones probably do. That's because over-drinking alcohol causes mood changes that can turn you into someone you're not.

If you find yourself snapping at your kids when you normally wouldn't, or fighting with your spouse over small things, those could be signs that alcohol is taking a toll on you and your mental health. The good news is there are simple, convenient tools to help and the sooner you recognize the problem, the sooner you can get the support you deserve.



¹Grossman, E. R., Benjamin-Neelon, S. E., & Sonnenschein, S. (2020). Alcohol consumption during the covid-19 pandemic: A cross-sectional survey of US adults. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(24), 9189. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17249189>

Take The Drinking Survey

Take the **CAGE Self-Assessment**, developed by Dr. John Ewing to learn about your own drinking habits.

- 1 In the last year, have you ever felt you should Cut down on your drinking?
- 2 In the last year, have people Annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
- 3 In the last year, have you ever felt bad or Guilty about your drinking?
- 4 In the last year, have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning (Eye-opener) to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

Answering "yes" to even one question could be a sign of mild, moderate or severe alcohol use disorder. Cutting back on alcohol has been shown to be more successful with support. Talk to your healthcare professional to learn more. You can also take this personal assessment online and get resources that fit your unique situation by visiting Up2SD.org/alcohol.

Your Risk is Their Risk

Kids and teens copy what their parents do. So if you develop alcohol use disorder, your children are more likely to as well. In fact, when adults have an unhealthy relationship with alcohol, the chances their kids will experiment with alcohol increases. However, when parents seek treatment, their children are shown to thrive.¹ Modeling healthy drinking habits and talking with your kids about alcohol are great ways to keep them safe and healthy — both physically and mentally. 90% of adults who struggle with addiction started using substances before the age of 18, that's why it's critical to talk to your kids about alcohol risks early and often.

¹ <https://www.alcohol.org/helping-an-alcoholic/children-of-alcoholics/>. Original sources: [2]. American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.[8]. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2019). *Alcohol use in families*. [25]. Miller, Shannon C.; Fiellin, David A.; Rosenthal, Richard N. (2018). *The ASAM Principles of Addiction Medicine*, 6th Ed.

How to Talk with Your Kids About Drinking and Mental Health

If your teen is experimenting with alcohol, they may be using it to cope with mental health challenges. Many people turn to alcohol to reduce stress or anxiety without realizing that alcohol use can actually increase stress and create a dependency¹. That's why it's important to talk with your child about alcohol. Even though it might feel awkward, your kids actually want to hear what you have to say about drinking. Telling them about the risks and helping them learn how alcohol can impact them and their mental health builds trust and helps them understand potential dangers.

Ask Questions

Keep the conversation positive and avoid lecturing. Asking them what they know and what they want to know can help create an open, two-way discussion that can open the door to future chats.

Be Calm and Supportive

Avoid talking to your child when you are angry. If you're upset, try some deep breathing exercises or take a walk beforehand to relieve stress. Come to the conversation relaxed and centered.

Pick the Right Setting

Look for ways to work your discussion naturally into conversation so it doesn't feel forced. Find a location that isn't distracting or restrictive. Driving in the car or going on a walk with the dog can be perfect opportunities to start talking.

Listen

Allow your child to ask all their questions and show you've heard what they said by repeating it back to them. Talk as long as they want to make sure you've heard everything they have to say.

Keep it Upbeat

Avoid judging your teen, try showing your concern instead by using words like "worried" instead of "disappointed". When they mention something they are doing right, make sure to praise them for it.

Stick to the Facts

Discuss real-life situations and consequences to them and their physical and mental health. Try to avoid overly dramatic or unlikely scenarios. Brainstorm things they could say to turn down alcohol or how to contact you in these situations. As your teen gets older, it's important to give them more details and facts about alcohol.

Start the Conversation Early

Begin talking to your child about alcohol and their mental health before their peers do, around age 10. Keep an open dialogue and explain your thoughts and expectations. Keep the discussions going as your child gets older.

Build Trust

Showing interest in your child's everyday life helps build a sense of openness. Having regular conversations with your child grows trust and gives you more frequent opportunities to chat about important topics.

¹ Koob, G. F., Powell, P., & White, A. (2020). Addiction as a coping response: Hyperkatifeia, deaths of despair, and covid-19. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 177(11), 1031–1037. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2020.20091375>

How Does Alcohol *Really* Affect You?

Separate fact from fiction, learn how alcohol can impact your mental health and what you can do about it.

Myth: Alcohol helps you sleep better.

Truth: You're actually more likely to have trouble sleeping after drinking.

Myth: Alcohol helps you relax and de-stress.

Truth: Over time, alcohol can actually change the chemistry in your brain, worsening anxiety and compounding the effects of stress.

Myth: If you have challenges with alcohol you need to stop drinking completely.

Truth: Today, addressing alcohol use disorder can range from cutting back heavy drinking days to stopping drinking entirely.