

ALCOHOL: TRUE STORIES

Hosted By
Matt Damon

Discussion Guide

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About *Alcohol: True Stories*

Thousands of young people are injured or killed in alcohol-related incidents every year. The use of alcohol also affects the emotional development of young people who drink.

Still, among young people, alcohol is the leading drug of choice. They—and many adults—think that underage drinking is a harmless rite of passage. Young people who avoid alcohol say a main reason is the positive influence of parents.

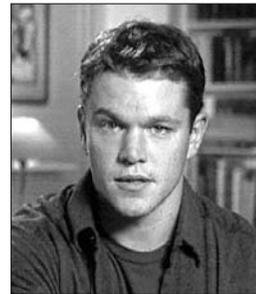
In *Alcohol: True Stories*, hosted by Matt Damon, young people talk about the effect that alcohol has had on their lives. They talk about the reasons young people drink, and give compelling reasons to wait.

Alcohol: True Stories—viewed, then discussed with questions from this guide—can help young people make wise decisions when they face tough choices about alcohol use. Parents who hear and discuss the stories will better understand the consequences of underage drinking. They'll learn they *can* influence their child's decisions.

We thank Robert, Dana, Megan, and Ilton for sharing their stories. We also thank our sponsors and advisors. And we're grateful to actor Matt Damon for his enthusiastic participation in this project.



Jeanne Blake
President, Family Health Productions



Showing *Alcohol: True Stories*

Alcohol: True Stories is appropriate for groups of young people, for parents in the workplace, at community events about positive decision making, and for family viewing at home.

Note: Alcohol: True Stories includes copyrighted materials. Broadcast, cablecast, Internet, duplication or commercial use in trainings or presentations is prohibited.

Profiles

Robert

Robert played soccer on an Olympic development team. One night after drinking, he crashed his dad's car. The crash severed Robert's leg. He talks about his decision to drink, and the lifelong consequences of his choice.

Dana

Two members of Dana's family were murdered. She knows that some people use alcohol to deal with stress. But Dana chooses a healthy way to cope—asking for and getting support from her best friend.

Megan

Megan was diagnosed with alcoholism at age 16. One night when she was drunk, she was sexually assaulted. Megan tells how she got help through her parents' support.

Ilton

Ilton is a talented hip-hop dancer. His dedication to dancing and his desire to be a positive role model help Ilton avoid using alcohol.

Using This Guide

This guide is designed to help lead discussions with young people, parents, and other caregivers. Parents can use this guide to discuss the program with their children. Questions are marked for:



young people



parents/caregivers

➤ Follow these arrows to proceed easily through the discussion.

Impact on Participants

Young people may feel a variety of emotions as they watch the program. It may have a powerful affect on young people who:

- Lost a loved one because of alcoholism or an alcohol-related incident.
- Have a parent or loved one who is an alcoholic.
- Had a negative experience while drinking alcohol.
- Are dependent on alcohol.
- Think they can drink without consequences.

Before Viewing the Program

Prepare participants for viewing the program by asking the following questions:

➤ Ask participants

- What contains more alcohol, 12 ounces of beer; five ounces of wine; or one and one-half ounces of 80-proof liquor such as vodka or whiskey?

Answer: All contain the same amount of alcohol.

- How does drinking affect your perceptions of other people?
- How much do you trust what people say when they're under the influence of alcohol?
- What do you think are the false messages TV and movies give about alcohol?
- What are the legal penalties for someone who's arrested while driving drunk?

Answer: Your license can be taken away until you are age 21. If that happens, you lose independence: you have to rely on others for rides to the mall, to work, to hang out with friends, or to go on a date.

Robert



▶ Begin discussion for young people by saying

We often hear the warning, “Don’t drink and drive.” Still, many people drive after drinking alcohol. Let’s talk about what happened to Robert who described feeling “bulletproof.”

▶ Ask young people

- After hearing Robert’s story, some people may say they’ll never drink and drive. Then, a few weeks later, they drink and get behind the wheel. Why do they change their minds?

Examples of what young people say:

- “I’m just doing it one time.”
- “It’s only beer.”
- “I’m only driving a short distance.”

- If you drank alcohol, what do you think are the chances that something bad would happen to you? If you’d be willing to take any risk with alcohol, explain why.

**Note: This question goes to the heart of decision making among young people. It deserves focused attention. Discussion of this question can help young people learn to anticipate potential consequences.*

- Robert says that sometimes he hates himself for what he did. How would you feel if you did something you would regret forever?
- What activities do you love that you could no longer do if you had an accident like Robert’s?
- When Robert described his dad’s visit at the hospital, how did you feel?
- Robert drank to get comfortable around older kids. How do you think Robert feels now about letting others intimidate him?

▶ Remind young people

Even small amounts of alcohol affect your judgment, coordination, and the way you make decisions.



➤ **Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying**

Parents often tell their children not to drink and drive. But, like Robert, young people continue to drink and get behind the wheel. Let's talk about how parents can help their children make safer choices.

➤ **Ask parents or caregivers**

- If you learned that your child drove after drinking, how would you respond?
- How do you help your children realize they aren't—as Robert says—"bulletproof"?
- How would you describe to your child the effect alcohol has on one's judgement and coordination?
- How do you try to build your child's self-esteem so that he or she is less vulnerable to pressure from peers?
- What would you do if you learned that your child was hanging out with young people who drank?

➤ **Remind parents or caregivers**

Some states hold adults responsible for the actions of people under age 21. You can help your children see that they're vulnerable—not "bulletproof"—by asking them smart questions and listening carefully to what they say. For example, ask what they'd do if they were offered a ride in a car with someone who was drinking. Follow-up with questions that help children consider how they could respond in that situation.

Dana



▶ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Dana suffered tremendous loss in her life. She admitted to feeling a lot of stress. Let's talk about how Dana copes with stress.

▶ Ask young people

- What are the healthy ways that Dana handles stress?
- What kinds of stress might cause some people to drink?

Examples can include:

- Pressure to do well in school.
- Fighting with parents or friends.
- Feelings of insecurity.
- Pressure to fit in.

- What are examples of healthy ways to reduce stress?

Examples can include:

- Talking to a friend.
- Exercising.
- Writing about how you feel.
- Listening to music.
- Talking to a parent or another adult you trust.

- Dana says avoiding alcohol helps her stay on track and achieve her goals. How might using alcohol affect your ability to reach your goals?
- Dana says that having a friend who doesn't drink helps her avoid alcohol. Why do you think that's helpful?
- Dana doesn't let others pressure her into drinking. What does this say about her character?

▶ Remind young people

Using alcohol to cope is unhealthy. As Dana says, "You're really not escaping, you're just adding to your problems."



➤ **Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying**

Young people say one reason they drink is to relieve stress. Let's talk about healthy ways you can help children learn to deal with the stress in their lives.

➤ **Ask parents or caregivers**

- When your child is stressed, what healthy activities do you suggest to help him or her relax?
- Consider how you handle stress in your life. Are you a positive role model for your children?
- When your children want to talk—just talk—are you able to listen without judging?
- If your children seem stressed, how do you let them know they can talk with you?
- Discuss the meaning of this phrase: When you get caught up in the moment, it's hard to remember your choices can impact your dreams.

➤ **Remind parents or caregivers**

The positive influence of parents is the number one reason adolescents give for not drinking alcohol. Teens whose parents talk with them about drinking are less likely to use alcohol.

Megan



▶ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Addiction is one risk of drinking alcohol. Megan says that after drinking for one year she didn't just want alcohol, she needed it. Let's talk about why Megan drank, and the price she paid.

▶ Ask young people

- Megan drank so that older guys would think she was cool. What characteristics do you think *really* make people seem cool?
- How do people look when they are drunk?
- If answers to the above question include "stupid" or "ridiculous," ask why some people drink to impress others.
- Why are people more vulnerable to sexual assault when they drink?
- Even though Megan says she needed alcohol and couldn't stop drinking, she insisted that she didn't have a problem. Denial is a symptom of alcoholism. If you were Megan, what would you have wanted your close friends to say to you about your drinking?
- Some people can drink responsibly at age 21. Others can't. Describe what you consider abusing alcohol.

▶ Remind young people

Like Megan, people who are addicted to alcohol often deny that they have a problem. Some alcoholics enter treatment recovery programs to help them stop. But treatment doesn't work for everyone. That's why Megan says, "When you start to drink, you're taking a chance."



➤ **Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying**

Megan says that at first she hid her drinking from her parents. Finally, after being sexually assaulted, she asked for their help. Let's talk about why Megan drank and how her parents responded when she told them the truth.

➤ **Ask parents or caregivers**

- How would you know if your child was drinking?
- Many parents limit their warnings about alcohol to saying, "Don't drink and drive." What does Megan's story tell you about other risks of underage drinking?
- When Megan told her parents what happened, they hugged and supported her. Their reaction kept communication open. How would you react if your child told you something you found upsetting?
- Spending unstructured time with children shows them you care about them. Do you create opportunities to hang out with your children?
- If your child saw you under the influence of alcohol, how would you explain your behavior?

➤ **Remind parents or caregivers**

Megan's parents don't drink, but alcoholism exists in her extended family. That's why she's at a higher risk for the illness. If your children are at a higher risk for alcoholism, it's important you discuss it with them.

Ilton



➤ **Begin discussion for young people by saying**

Sometimes young people drink alcohol because of pressure from peers. There are several reasons Ilton chooses not to use alcohol.

➤ **Ask young people**

- What are some of the reasons Ilton doesn't drink alcohol?
- Ilton's uncle had a problem with alcohol. If someone in your family is an alcoholic, how does that affect your risk of developing a problem with alcohol use?
- Ilton says that Lino got violent when he drank. What's the link between alcohol use and violence?
- Ilton's uncle is now a positive role model. How do you think his uncle's influence helps Ilton continue to avoid alcohol?
- How does Ilton's dancing help him keep his commitment not to drink?
- If your younger siblings see you drink or get drunk, what message are you giving them about underage drinking?
- If you drink because you feel pressure from peers, what does this say about how you make decisions?

➤ **Remind young people**

Research shows that alcoholism runs in families. If alcoholism is in your family—including your extended family—it's important that you realize you are at a higher risk of developing alcoholism if you drink.



➤ **Begin discussion for parents or caregivers by saying**

Ilton avoids alcohol because of the positive influence of his uncle and mother. Let's talk about how their support helps Ilton make positive choices.

➤ **Ask parents or caregivers**

- Ilton's mother reminds him that drinking alcohol has caused pain in their family. What do you tell your children to help them understand the risks associated with the use of alcohol?
- Ilton's uncle is a positive role model. What non-verbal message does your own use of alcohol give your children?
- Ilton takes being a role model for his brothers and other young people seriously. Have you talked with your children about the message they are giving their siblings about alcohol if they drink?
- How do you encourage activities that will help your children get what Ilton describes as "a natural high"?

➤ **Remind parents**

When children drink alcohol, it can affect their memory and ability to learn. The brain continues to develop until a person is around 21.

Reviewing the Messages

Alcohol: True Stories

Please complete the following sentences.

1. Which of the following has the most alcohol? (circle one): a) 12-oz. can of beer
b) 5-oz. glass of wine c) Mixed drink with 1 1/2 oz. of 80-proof spirits, like vodka
or whiskey d) All contain the same amount of alcohol.

2. It feels good to make decisions for yourself and to stick to them because

3. If you drink, there may be a time you don't get away with it. Then there's no turning back. This is difficult to imagine because

4. When alcohol is used as a crutch or an escape, it's dangerous because

5. When you get caught up in the moment, it can be hard to remember that your choices can impact your dreams because

6. There are better ways than drinking alcohol to cope with stress and sadness. For example, you could

Hurting People You Love

In *Alcohol: True Stories* you are asked to consider the risks you may be taking if you drink alcohol. "Are you risking hurting people you love? Are you risking hurting yourself?" Consider these questions as you answer the following questions.

1. Write the name of one close friend or loved one.

2. Explain how you'd feel if you were drinking and driving and this person was hurt in a crash you caused.

3. Write what you would say to your close friend or loved one if you hurt them because of your choice to use alcohol.

4. Write what you would say to that person, or their family, about the choice you made to drive after drinking.

5. Imagine that a person you care about drinks and then is getting into a car to drive, or is getting into a car with someone who has been drinking. Write down what you would say to them to try to stop them from getting into the car.

6. Write one activity you love to do with your friends and could not do if you were hurt in an alcohol-related crash as Robert was.

7. Write how you would feel, and why, if you had to give up that activity.

Family Health Productions

Family Health Productions produces programs, guides, training materials, and abouthealth.com to help families talk about the challenges young people face growing up.

Jeanne Blake is the producer of *Alcohol: True Stories* and the president of Family Health Productions. She is a television medical reporter and an affiliated faculty member of the Division on Addictions at Harvard Medical School. Blake speaks to parents at corporations, at health care organizations, and at schools, and consults nationally on family communication. She is also the president of Blake Works, Inc. and the author of the *Words Can Work™* series of books for parents.

Also From Family Health Productions

In Our Own Words®: Teens and AIDS

Five young people tell about being infected with HIV as teens through unprotected sexual intercourse. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people. 20 minutes.

Available in Spanish.

Recommended for grades 6 & up 

The Power of Girls: Inside and Out®

Five girls talk about the challenges they faced growing up and how supportive relationships with friends, family, and community helped. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

Recommended for grades 6 & up, parents and other caregivers 

Boys on Bullying

Five boys tell how bullying affected their lives and how support from family, peers and the community made the difference. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

Recommended for grades 5 & up, parents and other caregivers 

Raising Healthy Kids®: Families Talk About Sexual Health

Gives parents information and skills for talking with kids about sexual health. Includes discussion guides.

Program #1 *For parents of young children* Addresses setting limits, labeling body parts, how babies are made, self-touch, appropriate/inappropriate touch and more. 20 minutes.

Program #2 *For parents of preadolescents and adolescents* Addresses sharing values, keeping communication open, postponing sexual intercourse, avoiding absolutes, building strong relationships, and more. 20 minutes.

Recommended for parents and other caregivers 

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