

The Holidays can be a fun, exciting time of year. They can also be a stressful time of year. With frequent holiday parties and increased time spent with family, it's an important time of year to talk to the children and youth in your life about managing stress, healthy choices and staying away from drugs and alcohol.

From unmet expectations to feelings of isolation, it's an important time of year to teach skills helping youth manage their emotions. Give your children and youth space to share these emotions with you. Talk about your family traditions and why you have these traditions. Share with them what you do to manage your emotions and expectations during the holiday season. Part of helping your kids manage their emotions is to take care of yourself as well. [The Partnership for Drug Free Youth has a great resource on understanding and coping with your emotions this time of year.](#)

Holiday parties often include alcohol. If you are hosting, be sure your alcohol is monitored and that you are not providing to minors. One in three youth who begin using alcohol at a young age, start using by age 13, and the average age youth start trying alcohol in Ottawa County is 14.5. Early use of alcohol is associated with lifelong struggles with addiction. Talk to your teens about your expectations of them and why you don't want them to use alcohol early. Make it a little harder for your teen to start using by ensuring the alcohol is monitored and you are not allowing underage drinking.

Teachable moments abound during this time of year. Do you decorate this time of year? Use the time to talk to your teens about your own family traditions and about the memories you are hoping to create with them. Watch your teen's favorite show with them, and use the opportunity to have conversations. You'll learn a lot about what they are thinking about and what they are experiencing.

Safety first. As you celebrate the season, please be sure that you are making safe choices about driving. About 17% of Ottawa County teens say they have ridden in a vehicle with someone who had consumed alcohol. Make sure everyone arrives home safe and alive by not driving after drinking alcohol.

Do you have a family member with an addiction? Talk to your teens about what addiction means and what happens in the brain. Share with them how addiction affects all members of a family. Again, the Partnership for Drug Free Kids has great resources on [talking your teens](#) as well as [celebrating the holidays when your teen is struggling with addiction.](#)