There are many reasons why children start drinking.

As children approach their teen years, they begin to experience many emotional and physical changes – changes that are not always easy.[1] During this challenging and confusing time, even good children may experiment with alcohol.

For most children, it's not just one thing that influences them to drink, but a combination of factors.[2]

- **Stress**
  When children worry about things like grades, fitting in, and physical appearance, they may use alcohol as a way to escape their problems.[3] Encourage your child to get involved in sports or other extracurricular activities as a healthier way to cope.[4]
- **More Freedom**
  As children begin spending more time with their peers and less time with their parents, this increased freedom can lead to drinking.[5] While it's important to give your child space, keep track of where they are and who they're with. If they are at a friend's house, make sure a responsible adult is nearby or accessible.
- **Curiosity**
  Taking chances and trying new things is a normal part of growing up. For some children, this exploration includes experimenting with alcohol.[6] Remind your child about the real risks of underage drinking, and make sure he or she knows how you feel about underage drinking.
- **Peer Pressure**
  Most children feel pressure to be popular and fit in. Many try alcohol when they are in a social setting where "everyone else is doing it."[7] Help boost your child's confidence by helping them learn different ways to say "no", and reminding them that real friends wouldn't pressure them to drink.
- **Transitions**
  Life events, like going from middle school to high school, breaking up with a significant other, moving, or divorce, can cause a child to turn to alcohol.[8] Reassure your child that things will get easier, and make sure he or she knows that drinking isn't a solution.
- **Environment**
  If children grow up in an environment where adults drink excessively, they are more likely to drink themselves.[9] If you choose to drink, set a good example by drinking in moderation, and make sure your child knows that underage drinking is not acceptable.
- **Genetics**
  Children who come from a family with a history of alcoholism are at an increased risk for alcohol dependence. If alcoholism runs in your family, have an honest discussion with your child, and make sure he or she understands the seriousness of the disease.[10]
- **Personality**
  Children who are disruptive, hyperactive, or depressed are at a higher risk for alcohol problems.[11] If you feel that your child's social issues could lead him or her to abuse alcohol, consider having your child see a drug and alcohol counselor.

REFERENCES

[1]National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “Alcohol Alert,” 2006, No. 67, Page 1.
[2]U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking,” 2007, Section 2, Page 18.
[3]U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking,” 2007, Section 2, Page 21.
[4]National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child about Alcohol,” 2009, Page 18.
[5]SAMHSA, “Start Talking Before They Start Drinking,” 2009, Page 17.
[6]SAMHSA, “Start Talking Before They Start Drinking,” 2009, Page 16.
[7]National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child about Alcohol,” 2009, Page 5.
[8]U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking,” 2007, Section 2, Page 22.
[9]National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “Alcohol Alert,” 2006, No. 67, Page 3.
[10]SAMHSA, “Start Talking Before They Start Drinking,” 2009, Page 26.
[11]National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “Alcohol Alert,” 2006, No. 67, Page 2.