Choosing to drink alcohol or to abstain is a personal decision. If a person learns to drink moderately and safely, drinking does not have to be a high risk.* However, there are times when abstaining from alcohol use is the most appropriate decision for everyone to make.

Those who most often hassle others about their decision not to drink are usually immature, inexperienced drinkers. This same group of drinkers also tend to feel uncomfortable with their own drinking and are affected by pressure to drink from others.

When it is your time to abstain, the tips listed below may help you be successful in not drinking.

If you are sure of your decision and strong enough to stick by it, support your decision by:

- being around friends who support your decision not to drink
- going to a party, but bringing your own beverage
- finding an activity where there will be no alcohol (movie, miniature golf, play, basketball game,...)

If you need help sticking by your decision to abstain, or you need a temporary excuse for not drinking, these might work for you:

- if you attend a social event where alcohol is the main event, go with another abstainer
- host a party and stay sober
- pick up an empty beer can when you get there and fill it with water or a soft drink (if you feel like you need to look like you are drinking alcohol)
- avoid people who push drinking
- bring a soft drink
- have mineral water in a glass with ice
- use any of the following responses when offered a drink:
  "No thanks,..."
  "...I don't drink."
  "...but I will have a soft drink."
  "...I have a test tomorrow."
  "...I'm on medication."

* NOTE: Alcohol use may always be risky for pregnant women, and those on medication or addicted to alcohol.
Healthy Abstainer Profile

As part of teaching healthy drinking practices, it is important to discuss responsible abstinence from alcohol use. People who chose to abstain from alcohol use benefit from demonstrations of support and acceptance from the healthy drinkers they encounter. Whether one abstains for one weekend or (one day at a time) forever, information about healthy abstinence is useful and supportive.

Healthy Abstainers:

**Make a personal healthy decision to avoid alcohol use.**

Their decision to abstain is a free choice made by the person instead of bowing to peer pressure or authoritarian control.

**Respect the choice made by healthy drinkers.**

This means tolerating and respecting the choice made by a drinker who displays a healthy and responsible relationship with alcohol. This does not mean they respect or tolerate dangerous, exploitive or rude behavior by any drinker.

**Have the techniques to minimize the risks which may accompany abstinence.**

These are primarily social and may run from subtle pressure to verbal abuse, ridicule and ostracism. Such pressure is encountered more frequently from beginning drinkers (young adults) and problem drinkers. Most healthy abstainers have a repertoire of effective responses.

**Recognize alcohol as a potent drug.**

There are many potent drugs. The healthy abstainer makes responsible choices regarding the use or non-use of other potent drugs (nicotine, heroin, caffeine, sedatives, tranquilizers, etc.) The healthy abstainer does not abstain by substituting one potent drug for another.

**Abstain for positive reasons.**

Healthy abstainers do so out of love for self, love of God, love of others, joie de vivre. They do not abstain out of fear of death, fear of others, fear of God. Although fear may initiate abstinence, it rarely maintains abstinence over time.

**Own their abstinence.**

When asked, they acknowledge that they have chosen not to drink. If they care to they can articulate the reasons behind the decision.

Consuming or possessing alcohol under the age of 21 is illegal in Illinois.