

Teen Alcohol Use is Epidemic

Informed Parents are the Best Defense

While use of marijuana, cocaine, and other illegal drugs has decreased, alcohol abuse by young people remains extremely high. Nearly 75% of high school students have used alcohol. More than one-third report drinking alcohol weekly. Some are binge drinkers who report consuming fifteen or more alcoholic drinks per week. These young drinkers are at high risk of becoming addicted to alcohol and other drugs.

Why Young People Drink Alcohol

Peer pressure is the most significant reason young people consume alcohol. The age at which peer pressure is applied is younger than ever. Many seventh graders are subjected to the pressure to drink alcohol. Some young people drink for the same reason adults do - to feel good. *The Washington Post* reported twenty-five percent of young people who drink said they do so to get high, thirty-one percent reported drinking alone, and forty-one percent said they drink when they're upset because it made them feel better. Those who use alcohol alone or drink to counter bad feelings run a high risk of becoming alcoholics.

Key Players: Parents

Some parents say they're relieved that their children use alcohol instead of other drugs. This is a dangerous and harmful misconception. Changing passive attitudes and providing parents with the facts about alcohol and drugs are the first steps in drug prevention. Concerned parents must play a major role in educating children about drinking, drugs and driving. It must be realized that the fight against drugs begins at home with clear rules, healthy values and a good example of drug-free living.

“Alcohol-related crashes are the number one cause of death among young people age 16 to 24.”

RESOURCES

Parents - The Antidrug:

800-662-HELP

www.theantidrug.com

The Partnership at Drugfree.org:

855-378-4373

www.drugfree.org

www.timetotalk.org

National Institute on Drug Abuse - Parenting:

www.drugabuse.gov/parents-teachers

Alcohol Abuse and Youth:

<http://www.alcoholfreechildren.org/>

<http://www.sadd.org/>

<http://www.madd.org/>

>INFOCUS

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO DRINKING DRIVING & DRUGS



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Kids and Alcohol/Drug Related Crashes

Alcohol-related crashes are the number one cause of death among young people age 16 to 24. Although they make up only twenty percent of all drivers, young people are involved in almost half of all fatal car crashes. Many who are killed were neither drinking or driving ... they were passengers. About 26% of underage drinkers admit to driving under the influence. One third of adolescents say they have gotten in the car of a drunk driver.

Why Does Alcohol Impair Driving Ability?

The brain and spinal cord control vision, hearing, speech, movement, coordination, thinking, and judgement. When alcohol depresses brain and nerve cells, vision becomes blurred, hearing is distorted, speech is slurred, movement and coordination are impaired, reaction time lessens, thinking slows down, and judgement becomes unreliable.

How Can You Tell When Someone Is Drunk?

Some people act silly, emotional, rowdy, and unsteady on their feet. Others throw up or pass out. Some who are legally drunk show no outward signs of intoxication. Blood alcohol content is the true measure of intoxication and driving impairment. Anyone who has been drinking is a danger to themselves and others. For some, even one or two drinks can impair judgement and reaction time when driving, even though the drinker may seem sober.



Isolate The Problem Of Riding With An Impaired Driver

While there has been an increase in the number of young people who refuse to use drugs and alcohol, there are still many who do not recog-

nize the dangers that exist when they accept a ride from an impaired driver. Drinkers and drug users who drive face severe legal consequences and a lifetime of trouble.

Keys To Coping With Kids

For young people, the goal is to prevent all drug and alcohol use. There is no such thing as "responsible drinking" by minors. Parents must establish clear rules, arm their children with the facts about alcohol and other drugs, and communicate effectively.

Communication

Tell your child never to get in a motor vehicle with any person who has been drinking alcohol or using other drugs.

Make it clear that alcohol use by minors is against the law and that you will not tolerate any illegal actions.

Restrict dating, driving and other social privileges if rules prohibiting alcohol or drug use are broken.

Organize and supervise social alternatives to activities which are based on drinking alcohol.

If you choose to drink, set a good example by responsible consumption. Discuss how you set limits on yourself, but emphasize that drinking alcohol is an adult privilege not available to people before age 21.

If you don't drink alcohol for religious, health, or other reasons, explain your decision to your child. Realize, however, that your child is exposed to peer pressure and other attitudes that may differ from yours.



Separate facts about alcohol from your own opinions. State your rules and reasons for opposing alcohol consumption by teens. Use facts and the law to back you up, rather than inducing guilt or making threats.

Let your child know how much you love them. An open line of communication between you and your child will help them to be honest with you and come to you for help, even if he or she has broken the rules and used alcohol and drugs.

Don't lump all young drinkers together. Children who drink occasionally as a response to peer pressure need education and role models for non-drinking behavior. Those who drink regularly to combat bad feelings or escape problems need intervention, counseling and education.

Examine patterns of alcohol use in your family. If abuse is apparent, break the cycle of denial and addiction by facing the problem. Take action. You will be salvaging your family and may save your child's life.

Parents are the first line of defense against impaired driving.

