



Alcohol Abuse

"Not My Kid!"



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Perhaps the three most dangerous words parents can utter.

The use of alcohol among young people has been steadily on the rise. Today the average age of first alcohol use is 12 years old. Studies show that 50 percent of our youth feel the pressure to drink alcohol by the sixth grade. Over 40 percent of the deaths for young people ages 15 to 20 result from motor vehicle crashes. Two out of five motor vehicle fatalities involve alcohol.

Below are four questions to test your knowledge and attitudes about underage drinking. If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, this pamphlet will help to separate the myths from the facts about teenage drinking.



- 1) Do you consider underage drinking as just a sign of the times and a part of growing up?*
- 2) Are you relieved that your teenager was only involved in a "beer bust" and not in drugs?*
- 3) Are you more concerned with the consequences of the incident than your child's underage drinking?*
- 4) Do you believe the police should be investigating more serious crimes?*





Myths and the Facts

MYTH – It's only beer... It's just a harmless phase – part of the youth scene today.

FACT – Alcohol is a powerful drug – it impairs performance and retards development.

- Ethyl alcohol (ethanol) the substance in beer, wine and whiskey that produces intoxication, is a drug in the same chemical class as tranquilizers and barbiturates.
- Alcohol use by teenagers impedes the development of a wide range of skills needed for developing confidence and forming healthy relationships with family and friends.
- Academic achievement declines as the regularity and intensity of alcohol use increases.

MYTH – Booze will keep them off hard drugs.

FACT – Alcohol is often the gateway to other drug use.

- Alcohol is the “drug of choice” among young people and is frequently associated with the use of other drugs.
- There is a strong association between the use of alcohol and the use of marijuana.
- Marijuana use increases more than 50 percent among teenage drinkers.
- Heavy marijuana smokers are 75 percent more likely to try harder drugs.

MYTH – There is no difference between adults and teenagers drinking.

I would be a hypocrite to tell my child to abstain.

FACT – Teenagers are more vulnerable to both the long and short term effects of alcohol.

- The average alcoholic-prone adult takes 10 to 30 years to progress from the first drink to out-of-control alcoholism. Teenagers can walk the same road from the first drink to alcoholism in 3 to 6 months.
- Regular drinking causes kids to give up sports, hobbies and school work– resulting in withdrawal from family, devious behavior, guilt feelings and a declining sense of self-esteem.
- Alcohol suppresses inhibitions and judgment increasing the likelihood of sexual involvement at an early age. In a recent survey, 47 percent of teenagers admitted to being intoxicated the first time they engaged in sexual intercourse.

MYTH – My child can drink responsibly.

FACT – Underage drinking is against the law with severe consequences.

- There is no such thing as a “responsible” underage drinker. It is against the law in Pennsylvania for anyone under the age of 21 to consume, purchase, attempt to purchase or transport alcohol. This includes: minors taking a sip of beer at home, buying beer for a party and even delivering a six-pack to a relative.
- Anyone under the age of 21 will lose his or her drivers license for 90 days on the first conviction and face fines up to \$500 for consuming, purchasing, attempting to purchase or transporting alcoholic beverages. On a second offense, a one-year license suspension is mandated and a two-year suspension for a third offense.
- The same penalties are enforced for minors who possess a fake ID or falsify an ID card or lie about age in an attempt to buy alcoholic beverages. The law applies even if the minor is at a party far from any vehicle. If the minor is not old enough to get a drivers license, he or she will be suspended beginning on the person's 16th birthday.
- A parent or any adult who is caught supplying alcohol to someone under the age of 21 will be fined \$1,000 and \$2,500 for a second offense. That person could also be liable for any injuries and/or property damage resulting from those involved in underage drinking.



Some Warning Signs

- Missing bottles or watered-down alcohol in the family liquor cabinet.
- Empty alcohol containers in your child's bedroom or discarded on your property.
- Sudden use of strong perfume, cologne, mouthwash or breath spray.
- Ignoring curfews. Coming home late and avoiding confrontation.
- Bloodshot eyes, puffy face and that tired “hung-over” look.
- A drop in school grades, loss of memory, lack of concentration and slurred speech.
- A change in friends.

What You As A Parent Can Do

Now that you have become aware of the physical and mental effects of alcohol on the young, and the legal consequences associated with underage drinking, here are some of the things you can do if you suspect your child is using alcohol.

First, as a parent, you are in a unique position to help your child refrain from drinking. Let your child know that you will not tolerate underage drinking under any circumstances.

If you suspect your child is using alcohol, consult a professional counselor to do an objective assessment of your child's attitudes and the extent of his or her problem.

An Important Message from
Your State Senator

#4000

*Where to Get
Information?*

U.S. Department of Health & Human
Services and SAMSHA National
Clearinghouse for Alcohol and
Drug Information

www.health.org or **800-662-HELP**