

Alcohol and teens

Few people doubt that underage drinking is a problem. According to the New Mexico Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey, 42.3% of 9th thru 12th grade students used alcohol in the month preceding the survey. The one month time frame is important because it shows the students that are actively drinking. Sixty percent of 9th graders and more than 70% of 11th and 12th graders consumed five or more drinks on a single occasion, known as binge drinking. Binge drinking is significant because it is more difficult for the body to process large amounts of alcohol consumed at one time. Drinking was seen in all races and in males and females.

These statistics become more significant when one considers that people who start drinking before the age of fifteen are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence at some time in their lives.

According to the NIAAA, "Each year, approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking; this includes about 1,900 deaths from motor vehicle crashes, 1,600 as a result of homicides, 300 from suicide, as well as hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings." (<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/AA67/AA67.htm>)

The brain continues to develop until a person is in their twenties. The frontal lobe is still developing and the refinement of pathways and connections in the brain continues. Alcohol consumption can have long term, irreversible consequences. Learning and memory are affected more in youth than in adults. Alcohol disrupts the sleep cycle which is so important for learning. Alcohol also affects hormone levels needed for growth. In addition, alcohol affects coordination, emotional control, decision-making, hand eye coordination, speech and memory. Other problems seen in teens include depression, suicidal thoughts and violent behavior.

Teens give several reasons for drinking. They include boredom, escape from pressure, stress, pressure by peers and to celebrate and blow off steam. Some of these reasons are similar to adults and teens are often drinking to appear older.

Parents can help their teens say no to alcohol.

- Talk with your child. Teens say parental disapproval is an important part of their decision not to drink.
- Set consistent rules and enforce them.
- Let your child know you disapprove of underage drinking.
- Be involved with your teen.

- Know where your teen is when he goes out with friends. Do not have parties for teens and serve alcohol. It is against the law.
- Do not allow your teen to attend parties with alcohol.
- Let your child know not to ride with someone under the influence and always provide a way for your teen to get home if they get in a dangerous situation.
- Lock up alcohol in your house, along with guns and medicines. They can all be deadly.

For further information check these sites:

<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh/2k6nsduh/2k6results.cfm#3.2>

<http://www.why21.org/parents/tips.html>

<http://www.samhsa.gov/>

<http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/?gclid=COzrk52i-pMCFSMYagodBUJsWg>

<http://alcoholism.about.com/cs/teens/a/aa000307.htm>

<http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugs-alcohol.aspx#>