

**PARENT UPDATE**  
**TEENS & ALCOHOL**

*From The Changing Landscape:  
Addressing the Challenges of Teen Substance Abuse*

Brookline's recent community *Wellness Summit* gathered parents, students, Brookline Schools staff/administration, health experts, police, and community members to explore current trends in risky adolescent behavior and brainstorm strategies. One of the most pressing goals continues to be trying to reduce the prevalence of **underage alcohol consumption** and related high-risk behaviors. Especially concerning is **binge drinking**, which BHS teens say happens nearly every weekend, often involving hard alcohol. Teens report that when they drink, *they drink to get drunk*, and when this hits the level of binge drinking (consuming too much alcohol over a short period of time -- four drinks for girls, five for boys, in less than two hours) it can result in alcohol poisoning and damage to the part of the brain linked to learning and memory.

**FACTS:**

- Accidents account for nearly half of all teenage deaths, with alcohol the leading contributor.
- Kids who start drinking before age 15 are five times more likely to become alcoholics or abuse alcohol than those who wait until adulthood for their first drink.
- Alcohol industry promotes a culture of drinking at athletic events, concerts, etc.
- One reason kids DON'T drink is they are finding resources for other ways to cope with stress – sports, adult involvement, etc. They also consider safety issues – they know they can't make solid decisions when impaired. In addition, they don't want to affect their relationship with their parents, and athletics and some extra curricular activities have penalties for use.
- Friend groups are very influential in substance use choices.

**STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Create a Peer Leader/student-run one-day conference focusing on real stories from real people who have dealt with substance abuse issues (much like *Day of Dialogue*).
- Teach information on addiction and the brain in middle school. Consider a *Brain Science day*.
- Host non-drinking events – game or movie night?
- Extend mandatory health education to juniors and seniors, addressing safety, the risks of bingeing, and “safe zone” ideas – eating food, the buddy system, using Uber, etc.
- Educate parents about why students drink, the degree to which students binge drink, and the culture of house parties – most underage binge drinking is at parties when parents are not around. However, sometimes parents are present, which has huge liability issues. Plan an informational event and/or articles about social host laws, which make it illegal to host underage drinking.

**For more information, go to B-PEN's “Underage Drinking” page. If you or your organization would like to work with us on any of the above strategies, please contact Mary Minott, [mary\\_minott@psbma.org](mailto:mary_minott@psbma.org).**