

TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUR ADOLESCENT ABOUT ALCOHOL

The teenage brain is still developing, which makes underage alcohol use a serious issue with potentially devastating consequences. Each year approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking, more than all illegal drugs combined. Many kids start drinking in middle school -- one out of two 8th graders has already tried alcohol. However, research shows that when parents talk to their kids about alcohol, and send a clear message about the risks involved, kids are less likely to abuse alcohol and engage in unsafe behaviors. So here are some facts to keep in mind when talking to your teens about alcohol...

Alcohol is **illegal** under the age of 21.

Alcohol is a **depressant** that affects every part of the body, including the central nervous system and brain.

Alcohol can make you feel relaxed, or can make you more aggressive. Unfortunately, it also **lowers inhibitions**, which can lead to risky and embarrassing behavior.

It can **impair the parts of the brain** that control:

- * **Motor coordination** -- the ability to walk, drive and process information.
- * **Impulse control** -- lowered inhibitions increase the chances you will do something you will regret when you are sober.
- * **Memory** -- impaired recollection and even blackouts can occur when too much alcohol has been consumed.
- * **Judgment and decision making capacity** -- drinking can lead you to engage in risky behaviors that can result in illness, injury and even death.

PARENTS NEED TO KNOW....

People who reported starting to drink before the age of 15 were four times more likely to develop alcohol **dependence** at some point in their lives, even during adolescence and young adulthood.

Children who drink are over 7 times more likely to use any **illicit drug**, 22 times more likely to use **marijuana**, and 50 times more likely to use cocaine than children who never drink.

Alcohol use by teens is a strong predictor of both **sexual activity** and **unprotected sex**. (A survey of high school students found that 18 percent of females and 39 percent of males say it is acceptable for a boy to force sex if the girl is high or drunk.)

Children who start drinking before age 15 are 10 times more likely to engage in **violence** after drinking, compared with those who wait until they are 21 to drink.

Student substance use often results in **academic problems**, such as lower grades, absenteeism and high dropout rates. Alcohol can interfere with a student's ability to think,

making learning and concentration more difficult and ultimately impeding academic performance.

Drinking and driving can be deadly. Traffic crashes are the number one killer of teens and over one-third of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related.

TIPS TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN

- * **Spend time together** regularly.
- * **Listen and talk** with your children. Try to understand the pressures placed on them and don't criticize their beliefs.
- * **Keep track** of where your children are, what they are doing, and who their friends are.
- * Get them **involved** in after-school activities so they won't be able to just "hang out" with friends in the afternoon. This is when children are most likely to experiment.
- * **Praise** or reward children often. If they feel good about themselves, they will be more confident and better able to resist peer pressure.
- * Be a **positive role model** for your children. Don't abuse alcohol or drugs.

B-PEN (Brookline Parent Education Network) helps parents navigate the common social, emotional and developmental challenges of adolescence via parent network meetings, presentations, print/electronic materials, and resource information. For more information on **B-PEN** or for help starting a parent network, contact coordinators
June Harris June_Harris@psbma.org
Karen Campbell Karen_Campbell@psbma.org
and visit www.B-PEN.org

*informed * involved * connected*