

Parents Are the Foundation

Teens & Alcohol

April 2007

Parenting teenagers today can be challenging, frustrating and rewarding. Among the difficult issues for parents to deal with is the issue of teen alcohol use. As the parent of a teen you can play a critical role in helping your adolescent make sound and healthy decisions regarding alcohol. That's the focus of this newsletter—providing you, parents of teens and pre-teens—ideas that can increase the odds your child makes smart and healthy choices on alcohol use.

Research from the Iowa County Search Survey of 1274 7th – 12th graders shows that 66% of our teens have not used alcohol. The chart below illustrates the percentage of teens at each grade level that had **not** used alcohol in the 30 days prior to the survey.

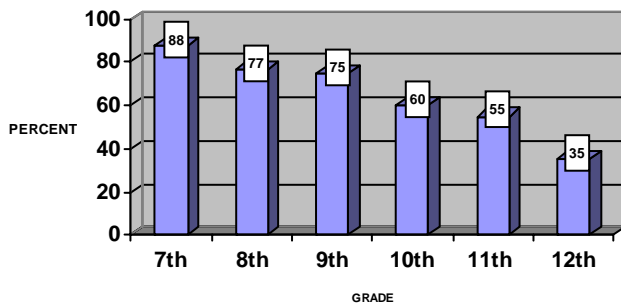


Chart A

Chart A: Percentage of Teens who have not tried alcohol in the last 30 days

Drunk teens. . . is this a problem? In addition to breaking the law (serious enough), teens who drink excessively are more likely to be sexually active, to use illegal drugs, and to be injured in accidents. In addition, teens who begin using alcohol before age 15 are at a higher risk for future alcohol-related problems including abuse and addiction.

In the Search survey, teens were asked to respond to the statement "It is against my values to drink alcohol while I am a teenager." Overall, 53% of the teens surveyed said they strongly agree or agree with this statement. These responses are summarized in this chart.

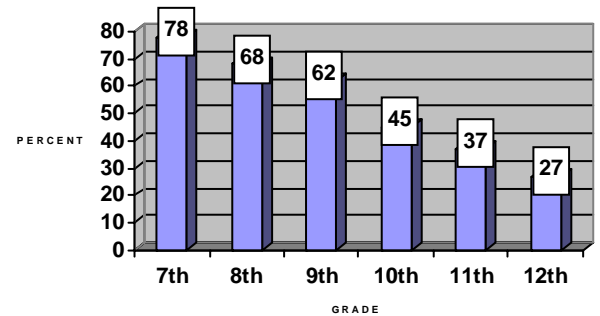


Chart B

Chart B: Percentage of students who agree "It is against my values to drink alcohol while I am a Teenager"

WHAT EFFECT DOES ALCOHOL HAVE ON THE TEEN BRAIN?

Recent research has found that alcohol does have effects on the teen brain, which is continuing to develop. Because adolescence is a time when the brain is forming new networks, exposing the brain to alcohol during this period may interrupt key processes of brain development.

A study of alcohol dependent and non-alcohol dependent 15 and 16 year olds found that alcohol dependent youth had greater difficulty remembering words and simple geometric designs after a 10-minute interval. Other studies have found that memory problems were common among adolescents in treatment who had experienced alcohol withdrawal symptoms.

A report by the American Medical Association states "underage alcohol use is associated with brain damage. The harmful consequences of underage drinking have implications for the learning abilities and intellectual development of underage drinkers. Impaired intellectual development may continue to affect individuals even after they have entered adulthood."

What Roles do Parents Play?

Parents have a critical and influential role in the decisions and choices their teenagers make, especially with tough issues like alcohol. Research demonstrates at least six parenting practices that can make a difference in teen alcohol use. These practices include:

- Eating dinner as a family.
- Communicating to your teen that you think it is wrong for teens to drink.
- Showing love and support for your teen.
- Reporting teens that violate school activity codes.
- Monitoring your teen's behavior.
- Establishing consequences for violating family rules and consistently enforcing those consequences when rules are broken.

ALCOHOL FACTS FOR YOUR TEEN

Many teens believe they know all there is to know about alcohol, but many myths and misinformation are prevalent in teenage culture. Some important facts to share are:

- **Alcohol is a powerful drug** that slows reaction time and impairs vision, coordination, clear thinking and judgment.
- **Beer and wine are not safer** than hard liquor. A 12-ounce can of beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine and 1.5 ounces of hard liquor all contain the same amount of alcohol.
- **It takes 2 to 3 hours for** a single drink to leave the body's system. Nothing can speed up this process; not coffee, cold showers, fresh air or walking it off.

How Do I Talk To My Teen About Alcohol?

- Talk with your teen or pre-teen NOW about the risks of drinking, and how you feel about teen drinking. Don't wait until a problem arises.
- Both parents should discuss alcohol issues with their teen and be united in their message of no-use.
- With your teen, agree upon the rules, expectations and consequences regarding alcohol use.
- Avoid "bargaining" with your teen, such as allowing drinking if there is no driving or allowing drinking at home when a parent is present. This sends mixed messages to teens and encourages them to push the boundaries even further.
- Don't give in to the "everyone does it" argument, because not everyone does!!
- Encourage your teen to participate in healthy behaviors, such as youth clubs and team sports or to volunteer after school or on weekends in the community.
- If your teen chooses to use alcohol, do not accept or ignore the use. Approach your teen and impose the agreed upon consequences. Following through on consequences (when rules are broken) and rewards (when rules are followed) is essential.

**REMEMBER:
PARENTS ARE THE FOUNDATION!**

"Parents are the Foundation" is a monthly, school-year newsletter containing information from the 2005 Survey of Student Resources and Assets in Iowa County Schools by America's Promise and the Search Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Iowa County. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension Teen Assessment Project "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" newsletter series. This issue was written by Deb Ivey and edited by Ruth Schriefer and Sarah Weier. Thanks are extended to the 1,264 7th to 12th graders in Highland, Mineral Point, Pecatonica and River Valley who participated in the survey. For more information, contact us at UW-Extension Iowa County, 608-935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/iowa/>