



**PARENTS AS
A RESOURCE:**

*TALKING WITH
ADOLESCENTS
ABOUT
ALCOHOL*

**PARENTS AS
A RESOURCE:
*TALKING WITH
ADOLESCENTS
ABOUT ALCOHOL***

**A Compilation of Information from
Parents, Teens, and The Scientific
Community**

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INTRODUCTION

I just can't believe it. I know that teenagers today can be irresponsible, but I didn't think this could possibly happen in our family. I talked with him about all of this. It must be the new friends he met at school. I try not to be upset, but it really upsets me. I should have been stricter. He just never listens to me. Well, he's gonna own up to his actions and that is that. How could he do this?

The above comments were made by the mother of a 16 year old teenage boy who had recently been in a car accident after driving drunk. What could the mother have done?

- Should she and her spouse have been more strict?
- Could they have talked more or differently about alcohol and drunk driving?
- Is there anything that they could have said to their teenager to prevent the incident?

Alcohol is the most misused and misunderstood drug in our society. Although teens are under the legal age for drinking alcohol, it is important to remember that alcohol is the most widely used drug by this age group.

National surveys of 10th grade students show:

- 1 out of 5 report being drunk in the past month,
- 1 out of 3 drink regularly, and
- 1 out of 5 are binge drinkers.

By the time males are 18 years old, 1 in 4 of them are considered to be binge-type heavy drinkers (they drink once a week or more and have five drinks at one time).

One of the results of the misuse of alcohol in this age group is binge drinking. Binge drinking has been consistently associated with higher incidences of unplanned sexual activity, sexual and physical assaults, date rape, injuries, trouble with police, and alcohol-related driving injuries and fatalities.

Time and time again we have heard some parents say, "There is just no use - they will do what they want anyway and don't care what we say." This underestimates the influence that parents can have — **YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

Families are quite different from one another and we have written this handbook to reach a wide audience. Consequently, there may be some sections of the handbook that you can relate to better than others. This is okay. Not all families are the same and we tried to respect those differences.

****By reading this handbook and talking with your son or daughter, you have the opportunity to reduce the likelihood he or she will experience the negative consequences associated with binge drinking. ****

THE WORLD OF THE ADOLESCENT

As teenagers make the transition from childhood to adulthood, they experience many changes in their physical appearances, the social demands placed on them, and the types of challenges that they must address and resolve. In this section, we summarize some of the experiences that your teen may be having. We discuss the world of the teen in terms of cognitive and thinking orientations, social/emotional adjustment, and moral thinking.

THINKING SKILLS DURING ADOLESCENCE

As an adolescent, the cognitive development of your child is still very much in progress. Adolescents tend to think in more concrete terms than adults, putting them at somewhat of a disadvantage when forced to cope with social and peer pressures related to such things as sex, alcohol consumption, and drugs.

Thinking ahead means wondering about what he or she is going to do this weekend, as opposed to next year. The tendency is to focus more on immediate feelings, such as "How I feel right now" as opposed to "How I will feel about things next month, next year, or three years from now."

Although most teens are aware of the potential risks of drinking, they may continue to think things like, "My friend drinks and nothing bad has ever happened." A single concrete experience might have more impact than facts. It is important not to assume that providing information is enough.

Teens may also think "Nothing bad will happen to me." Adolescents have a difficult time personalizing risk and they frequently assume that negative things happen to others, not to them.

The **bottom line** is adults may have a series of beliefs and thoughts that simply *do not exist* for teens. Parents can assist teens in developing broader thinking skills by focusing both on short term consequences and long term consequences, even when teens show little interest. One of the reasons that peer groups so strongly influence adolescent development is that the differences in power between teenage friends are usually small compared to differences in power between teens and adults. This enables adolescents to work out problems together rather than merely giving in to a more powerful individual (like a parent or a teacher). Such relationships also permit teens to explore problems with each other, without feeling threatened by punishment.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT

Adolescents tend to feel that much of the world revolves around them and how they are feeling. This is frequently accompanied by feelings of being unique. "No one has felt the way I feel, no one has experienced what I am experiencing." That is why, when parents say "I know how you feel," teens may reject this as being impossible. They believe that so much has changed about being a teen that only other teens "know what they are going through."

For many teens, a sense of rivalry develops with their parents. They sense that they are becoming adults and are ready to "compete" in the same world as the parents. Many teens complain that parents don't allow them enough freedom. This is a natural extension of their desire to form a unique identity.

Because teens are growing up and are gradually making more and more of their own decisions, they also want to feel as if they are in control and can handle any situation even when this is not the case. It becomes difficult, then, for parents to safely offer helpful advice without their teen reacting with something like, "I got it. I can handle it." Rather than forcing advice on an unreceptive teen, it may help to clarify that you respect their decisions, but you would appear to be an uncaring parent if you didn't try your best to help. For example, "I'm not trying to tell you what to do. I know you can handle things. Maybe it would help to at least talk about it. It would make me feel more comfortable. What's your plan?".

High self esteem is important in the teen years. A teenager with high self esteem feels good about himself or herself, has confidence in his or her abilities, and feels a sense of satisfaction in social interactions and one's social life. Feelings of high esteem fluctuate from one time to another as the teen experiences different events in his or her life.

As a result of the physical and emotional changes they are experiencing, adolescents tend to become more self-conscious and "touchy." Teens can be easily hurt when criticized. One moment they feel like an adult and want to be treated as such, the next moment they feel like a child and want to be cared for. Teens may become withdrawn and adopt a rebellious orientation toward society (which they equate with their parents). There is often a period where teens feel ashamed of their parents and are embarrassed to be with them. All of these reactions are natural outgrowths of the physical, social and emotional changes that the teen is undergoing.

MORAL REASONING DURING ADOLESCENCE

In childhood, children tend to evaluate whether something is right or wrong on the basis of the consequences it has for them personally. In adolescence, moral thinking includes others. One aspect of this is shown by how they justify their decisions by saying "But everyone is doing it." If their peers are doing it, it makes the behavior seem more morally right to them instead of looking to one's own standards and values.

Another feature of early adolescent moral reasoning is the concept of responsibility. Teens frequently believe that if one did not consciously set out to do something, then one can be excused for the behavior. "We did not mean to drink a lot; things just happened."

In sum, changes in thinking, social and emotional adjustment, and moral reasoning all influence teen behaviors. Parents can help their teens meet these different challenges by understanding that these changes are a natural part of their growth, through positive parenting practices and good communications (discussed in the next section).

PARENTING STRATEGIES AND COMMUNICATION

Parents adopt general strategies for raising their children. Sometimes parents are consciously aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it. For other parents, the parenting strategy they use is only implicit and the parent cannot easily verbalize the general orientation that he or she is taking.

POSITIVE PARENTING STRATEGIES

Research shows that the following parental strategies are associated with POSITIVE teen development and lower alcohol consumption:

- Encouraging teens to make their own choices, even if the choices are relatively minor ones. Sometimes choices can be framed by the parent in ways that the teen is choosing between two desirable alternatives.
- Respecting teens' drive for independence, yet maintaining legitimate limits.
- Providing parental guidance for those choices that are so important to the life course of the teen.
- Gradually relinquishing control, with teens gaining more freedom and responsibility with each passing year, yet maintaining legitimate limits.
- Challenging teens, but with challenges that are appropriate.

Conversely, research shows that the following parental strategies are associated with less positive teen outcomes and higher alcohol consumption:

- Telling teens they are expected to do what they are told or else face serious consequences.
- Using punishment or fear of punishment to keep teens in line.
- Considering requests for explanations from the teen as an affront to parental authority.
- Seeing the world as a threat and communicating this fearfulness to teens.
- Trying to adopt a non-directive role in a teen's life.
- Permitting teens to explore their environment unhampered by interference from the parent.
- Feel that their child is free to make his or her own mistakes and learn from them accordingly by providing little guidance.

SOME COMMUNICATION POINTERS

HERE ARE SOME DO'S AND DON'TS STUDIES HAVE SHOWN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN HOW TEENS RESPOND:

Listen. Permit the person to speak without interruption. Listen to what he or she says. Sometimes, it is good to paraphrase. “Let me see if I understand you. It sounds like you feel that...” With paraphrasing, you don't agree or disagree, you interpret.

Verbalize respect. Whenever you can and it is appropriate to do so, convey respect to the other individual (e.g., “I admire what you have done and how you are coping”). People want to be respected and will be more willing to talk to those who respect them. Tell your son or daughter you are proud of them for being able to handle these tough situations.

Choose a good time. Choose an optimal time to bring up and discuss problems. Don't do it when the other person is rushed or has a commitment elsewhere. Wait until you both can have a relaxed, calm discussion. Perhaps you could take your child to lunch or out for some ice cream where you could both sit down to talk and listen to one another.

Communicate directly. Don't talk about important things while absorbed in another activity, such as reading the newspaper, watching television or doing the dishes.

Try to appeal to common goals. Teens need to be reminded that you are on their side. Whenever possible, common goals should be emphasized and should serve as the basis for your guidance and recommendations (e.g., You both want them to stay healthy and safe).

Avoid communication “stoppers.” These are single statements that will close anyone down (e.g., “Anyone who drives drunk is crazy;” “No one in this family would ever consider doing that”).

Conflict is natural. Realize that conflict is natural. We are not identical to one another. We all have different beliefs and values, therefore disagreement is a natural thing. We should use conflict as an opportunity for growth and for learning about each other rather than treating it as a negative experience.

Agree to disengage. Agree to temporarily stop if things don't go well. Wait until both individuals can talk in a calm, direct fashion.

Use appropriate body language. How you position yourself as you talk can send important messages about your attitudes or possibly convey something you are not trying to convey. Don't look away or slouch down. Nod your head in agreement.

Avoid debate mode. Sometimes conversations become structured so that people feel that they must “defend” their position. The entire conversation turns to a mini-debate. If you sense the conversation has turned into a debate, try suggesting that you both approach matters from a different angle. Also avoid statements that begin with “you” (“You did this...”). They often make the other person feel attacked.

BEGINNING A DIALOGUE

The first step in effectively talking with your teen is simply getting the talking started. Such conversations will not necessarily occur in a single sitting, but often will evolve over time. As a parent you must take active steps to establish the dialogue that is so important to both you and your teen. When the time is right, you will want to suggest to your teen that you would like to talk with her or him. Don't expect your teen to agree. In fact, many teens will respond with a negative reaction.

HERE ARE SOME COMMON NEGATIVE REACTIONS THAT TEENS HAVE WHEN PARENTS TRY TO OPEN A DIALOGUE ABOUT SENSITIVE TOPICS AND A FEW WAYS OTHER PARENTS FIND ARE USEFUL IN DEALING WITH THEM:

- **FEAR OF HEARING A LECTURE.** Many teens are open to talking but the last thing they want to hear is a one-way lecture from their parents about right and wrong. *****Studies show more drinking goes on in teens who come from homes where parents tend to lecture too much.*****

Teen Objection: "I know what you will do if we talk. You'll lecture me like you always do. Then if I argue you will interrupt me."

Parental Response: "You're right. This time I won't lecture. I will listen to what you think."

- **ANGER ABOUT NOT BEING TRUSTED.** Some teens interpret a request to talk as a sign that you do not trust them. *****Studies show that when teens feel they can trust their parents and are trusted by them they tend to drink less.***** You will need to offer reassurance that you are not suspicious and are doing this to help them, not attack them.

Teen Objection: "What's the matter, don't you trust me?"

Parental Response: "I trust you. But this is a very important issue and I think we need to pool the information we know to make sure you deal with everything effectively and that you know

- **FEAR OF PUNISHMENT.** Another common objection focuses on fear of being punished. *****Studies show that when teens fear punishment they communicate less often with their parents.***** In turn, these teens tend to drink more often and are more likely to experience alcohol-related consequences.

Teen Objection: "Sure, talk with you and you won't let me go out. Forget it."

Parental Response: "I promise that I won't be that way. I will listen to you. I'll take what you say seriously. I'll be straight with you and you be straight with me."

- **HE/SHE THINKS THEY ALREADY KNOW IT ALL.** Some teens don't want to talk because they think they already know everything there is to know about a topic. Even though teens think they know everything, they often do not. Don't let this objection deter you in your pursuit of communication.

Teen Objection: “I've heard it all before. We don't need to talk.”

Parental Response: “You probably already know quite a bit. It would **make me** feel better if we talked it through. Besides, it would help me to better understand how things are different from when I was your age.”

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

There are other objections that you might get, although these are the major ones. Sometimes you will hear more than one of them from your son or daughter. The central themes in your response should be that of **CARING** about the teen, wanting to **UNDERSTAND** the student, and wanting to **HELP** the teen, while at the same time **RESPECTING** the teen's privacy and desire to be independent. The example parental responses we gave illustrated these themes. They may not work well for your particular son or daughter and you may need to adapt them to his or her particular personality. But if you have open communication channels, you are more likely to help your teen. Most of all, be constructive in your responses, not defensive or angry.

COMMUNICATION: THE SHORT RESPONSE

A number of parents who we have interviewed express frustration at their inability to get their son or daughter to talk at length on any issue. They swear that their son or daughter has a vocabulary comprised mostly of “Okay, Mom,” “I dunno,” “Whatever,” “If you want,” “Sure, okay,” “Not now,” when it comes to parental conversation. Some teens use these responses when they don't feel like talking because they are busy, tired, or simply not in the mood. Maybe the teen thinks he or she is just going to hear yet another lecture from the parent. Maybe the teen thinks that the parent will start nagging at him or her, yet again. The teen may think the parent just doesn't understand them.

Parents need to respect this and not force communication at a bad time. Let it drop and bring it up later. Try to structure a time to talk when the student is apt to be open to it. Teens are often tired at the end of a hard school day or an athletic event, and this may not be the best time to try to start a conversation. Or the teen may be preoccupied with something else. Think about your teen's schedule and how you can create a time where you will have his or her undivided attention. Perhaps taking him or her out to a quiet dinner or some other place where a “one-on-one” conversation can be effectively initiated will work.

MAKING AGREEMENTS

Communication is most effective when it results in agreements between the parent and teen about how the teen is going to behave. Parents and teens often make agreements only to have the teen break them. Instead of being a true agreement, the agreement really represents an imposition of what the parent wants. A good agreement is one that is clear to all and agreed to by all. At times, you may have to ask for an agreement based on respect for your authority. In such cases let it be known that your purpose is to protect and your intent is to eventually give freedom.

Agreements will be honored when they are made in the context of high-quality relationships. High quality relationships are built on mutual trust, where both participants can be confident that the other will be honest, responsible, and caring. High quality relationships are characterized by...

- **respect** for one another
- **empathy** and **understanding**
- **knowledge** of each other
- mutual **trust**
- **concern** for one another

SELF-ESTEEM AND PEER PRESSURE

It is important that you foster self esteem in your teen. This requires that your teen feels both worthwhile and lovable. Many of the suggestions provided in previous chapters will help you to accomplish this. Communicate with your teen in an open and honest fashion. Encourage him or her to talk about his or her feelings. Negative feelings when expressed and accepted lose their power. Show respect and caring for your teen. Adolescents value themselves to the degree that they feel they have been valued.

TECHNIQUES FOR BUILDING SELF ESTEEM

HERE ARE SOME SPECIFIC THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP FOSTER HIGH LEVELS OF SELF ESTEEM:

Give lots of praise. Look for achievements, even in small tasks, and praise your teen often. Praise the person as well as the behavior: Remember that it's important for your teen to gain your approval, so try to praise more than criticize.

Help your teen set realistic goals. If the parent or teen expects too much, then failure can have a dramatic effect on self esteem. Low self esteem is often associated with impossible demands on oneself. Be realistic about your expectations and help your teen to be realistic.

Give your teen choices. Self esteem is enhanced if you perceive that you control your life. Where possible, allow your teen to make choices. Try to let your teen be his or her own person.

Provide your teen with responsibilities. Adolescents who help out will learn to see themselves as an important part of the family unit.

Don't compare your teen's efforts with other teens. Teach your teen to value his or her individuality. Point out areas you see as strengths that your child may take for granted or not recognize at all.

Don't treat the teen's problems lightly. When your teen is upset over something let them know you are there, but give them some time to work it out. Some things that seem trivial to you might be a big deal for your teen and you should respect that. Trivializing feelings can lower self esteem.

Finally, the world is such that all of us are going to experience negative feedback of some kind. Individuals will develop high self-esteem to the extent that they can put such negative feedback in a proper perspective. They will have high self esteem if they are confident they can overcome adversity, solve problems that occur, and rise above the negatives that are occurring in their lives. Self esteem, then, is as much influenced by how we respond to negative events as it is to the occurrence of positive things in our lives. This means that it is important for parents to teach their children how to solve problems and cope with stressful events.

Good problem solving involves the following skills:

1. Being sensitive to when problems exist and recognizing the need to do something about them.
2. Specifying a range of alternative courses of actions that will potentially alleviate the Problem.
3. Gathering information about the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative.
4. Carefully thinking through the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative course of action and selecting the one that seems to be the best.
5. Carrying through on one's decision.

REDUCING PEER PRESSURE

The most influential reason why teens drink is because of social reasons. Friends can influence your son or daughter in two major ways. First, there is active social influence, which occurs when a friend explicitly suggests that your son or daughter engage in some behavior (e.g., “Let’s go get drunk”). Second, there are passive influences such as when they think everyone is doing it and that it is an acceptable thing to do. **Part of reducing social pressure is not only helping your son or daughter to resist active influence attempts but also helping your teen to put into perspective the fact that (1) not everyone is necessarily doing it, (2) even if many people were, this does not make it right or a good thing to do, and (3) friends may respect your son or daughter for not drinking.**

There may be times when your son or daughter may be put in situations where he or she is pressured by one or more peers to perform behaviors he or she would rather not engage in. For example, he or she may be pressured by someone to have a drink when your son or daughter doesn’t want to. Teens need to develop skills to resist such pressure and affirm their own values, beliefs, and attitudes.

COMMON PRESSURE LINES

Teens are exposed to a wide range of pressure lines to try to get them to experiment with drugs or alcohol. Here are some examples of what they might hear:

- COME ON, EVERYONE HAS TRIED IT.
- IF YOU WON'T DRINK WITH US, THEN WHY ARE YOU HANGING OUT WITH US?
- IT'S ALL PART OF GROWING UP.
- WE DRANK ONCE BEFORE, SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM NOW?
- YOU WILL LOVE IT!
- YOU'LL HAVE AN INCREDIBLE TIME IF YOU DO.
- COME ON, TAKE A DRINK. IT WILL GET YOU IN THE MOOD.
- EVERYONE IS DOING IT.
- YOU'VE BEEN WORKING TOO HARD. YOU DESERVE TO GO PARTY.
- YOU CAN STUDY TOMORROW.

Teens need to develop adequate responses to such pressure lines. What they need most are simple but effective “one liners” that will diffuse the pressure without making a big scene or issue about it. It is difficult for parents to provide such responses to the teens because parents usually are not aware of the current language that teens use with one another. It is probably more useful for parents to tell their teens that they will probably be exposed to pressures to drink and for the teen to try to think of short yet effective responses to pressure attempts. Often such simple phrases as “It’s just not for me, it’s not what I want” or “I don’t drink” will work quite effectively. We have evaluated a wide range of possible responses and teens clearly prefer simple, straightforward “outs” to the pressure situation. Encourage the teen to think about such “one liners” beforehand to be prepared if he or she finds himself or herself in an uncomfortable situation.

Suggestions for simple responses include:

- Saying “No thanks.”
- Offering an alternative like “I’d rather have soda.”
- Making an excuse like “I have a test to study for tomorrow.”
- Having an explanation like “I really just don’t like the taste.”
- Changing the subject.

SOCIAL PRESSURE: ADOLESCENT FRIENDSHIPS

Parents should talk with their teens about the bases of true friendships. During early adolescence, teens tend to base friendships on common interests and companionship. With age, teens increasingly place importance on mutual acceptance and providing each other with emotional support. Friendship should not be based on such superficial things as money, looks, popularity, or being with someone who is “cool.” Friendship derives from mutual respect, empathy, knowledge, trust, and concern.

Parents can prevent their teen from being unduly influenced by a single “bad” friend by helping the teen to make many different friends. Parents can encourage their teen to participate in extra-curricular programs, church functions, or community centers where they are likely to meet other teens who have values that are consistent with those held by the parent. By having diverse sets of peer groups, teens will almost certainly end up being exposed to conflicting norms: Something that is valued by one peer group will not be valued by another peer group. The teen will quickly learn that it is not possible to “please everyone” and that trying to do so is futile. This will, in turn, help the teen to foster a certain degree of independence from group pressure and group norms.

When a teen has a friend who the parent strongly disapproves of, probably the worst thing that a parent can do is to forbid the teen from seeing that friend. Teens tend to value their

friendships highly and will defend their friends strongly. By directly attacking the friend, the parent places the teen in the position of having to defend the friend, thereby forcing the teen to think about and verbalize all of the "good" features of the friendship. If done in a sensitive and open fashion, most teens will be responsive to parental input.

Finally, there may be times when your teen will face pressure from *several* friends at the same time. Individuals sometimes find it more difficult to stand up against a group of friends who are determined to persuade him or her into doing something like drinking alcohol.

Situations where the pressure will be the greatest are when:

- The friendships within the group are extremely strong.
- The group is insulated from outside influences such as other friends or parents.
- The group has one person that the other members of the group look to as the leader.
- When the group mistakenly believes that they are invincible (We won't get caught; Nothing bad will happen to us).
- When the group believes that only bad things happen to others (Those things happen to others who are not as careful as us...We'll be more careful).
- When the group pressures individuals who try to go against the group.

Being able to recognize signs of strong group pressures, having well developed problem solving skills, high self-regard, and resistance skills will ultimately help your teen stand up for what he or she believes in, even under trying circumstances.

TALKING ABOUT ALCOHOL

Alcohol is the most misused drug in our society, although most people do not even consider alcohol to be a drug. **It only takes a single episode of intoxication to experience life-changing consequences, like rape, accidents, arrests, etc.** We are not so naive that we think that parents talking with their sons and daughters about alcohol use will put an end to alcohol consumption in college students. However, you should do everything in your power to minimize odds of them being at risk.

PARENTAL RELUCTANCE TO TALK WITH STUDENTS ABOUT DRINKING

| MYTHS | FACTS |
|---|---|
| My son or daughter is not interested in drinking. | Over 90% of students try alcohol outside the home before graduating from high school. |
| My son or daughter has learned about the negative effects of alcohol in school. | Although most students do learn about alcohol in their classes on health, we have found that many important issues never get covered. |
| At this point my son or daughter should know better. | Unfortunately, the reality is that many students at this point in their lives are still uninformed about how powerful a drug alcohol can be. |
| My son or daughter won't listen to me at this point. | The results of the American College Health Survey revealed that parents were the number one source that students turned to for important information. |

IN YOUR TALKS THERE ARE SEVERAL TOPICS THAT YOU SHOULD BE SURE TO ADDRESS:

First, you should talk about how drinking affects the body. Students need to know how drinking on a given occasion will affect them.

Second, you should make clear your own position concerning your student's drinking, exactly what is okay and what is not.

Third, students drink for a variety of reasons. If you address this directly, then he or she will be better able to think through the choices she/he makes when confronted with "positive" motivations.

Fourth, you need to discuss reasons for **NOT** drinking and the many negative consequences that can result from drinking.

Finally, you need to make clear your willingness to help your son or daughter find constructive alternatives to drinking.

HOW ALCOHOL WORKS IN THE BODY

Alcohol is a drug that is absorbed into the bloodstream from the stomach and the small intestine. It is broken down by the liver and then eliminated from the body. **There are limits to how fast the liver can break down alcohol and this process cannot be sped up.** Until the liver has had time to break down all of the alcohol, the alcohol continues to circulate in the bloodstream, affecting all of the body's organs, including the brain. Nothing can speed this up. Not exercise, drinking coffee, etc. Nothing.

In the media it is suggested that most individuals can have one drink per hour and maintain sobriety. Unfortunately, this is a dangerous rule. For individuals weighing over 200 pounds this might be true, but for most females and males, even ½ drink per hour could lead to intoxication and the bad things that go along with it (unsafe/coercive sexual experiences; fights; accidents).

As alcohol reaches the brain, a person begins to feel drunk. The exact nature of this feeling can vary considerably from individual to individual and even within the same individual from situation to situation. What is common to all individuals and all situations is that alcohol *depresses* the brain and slows down major functions such as breathing, heart rate, and thinking. This is one reason why alcohol is so dangerous. **If an individual drinks too much alcohol, his or her breathing or heart rate can reach dangerously low levels or even stop.**

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Alcohol is measured in terms of blood alcohol content. In the popular press, you may see reference to terms such as BAC or BAL. A BAC of 0.1 percent means that 1/1000 of the fluid in the blood is alcohol. This may seem very small, but it does not take much to achieve this level. For example, a 150-pound male who consumes 5 drinks in 2 hours will have a BAC near 0.1. A 115-pound female who consumes 4 drinks in 2 hours will have a BAC near 0.1. **At a BAC of 0.1, most students will be very drunk. Their thinking, vision, hearing, reaction time, movement and judgments of speed and distance will be seriously impaired.** It is likely that the brain will not form new memories even though the person is completely conscious and speaking. This is what is known commonly as a “**black-out**”. The person is awake, but the brain is focusing on other more important tasks such as breathing and keeping the heart and blood going.

Most students **DO NOT** know how drinks influence the blood alcohol level. In fact, they have many misconceptions about how drinking affects BAC. Students tend to think that the impact on BAC of additional drinks is smaller after more drinks have been consumed. This is wrong. Each additional drink adds the same amount of alcohol to the blood whether or not that drink is the first or fifth drink.

People are notoriously bad at estimating how drunk they are. In cases where they are very drunk, it is indeed obvious. But more often than not, people get to the point where they are impaired but do not realize it. Study after study has demonstrated that people are extremely poor at guessing how sober they are.

Many accidental deaths occur from mixing alcohol with other drugs. Even drugs that you can buy without a prescription, such as aspirin or cold remedies, can change the way alcohol acts on the body.

| ALCOHOL (BEER, WINE, LIQUOR) MIXED WITH: | EFFECTS: |
|--|--|
| Antibiotics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme drowsiness • Decreases effectiveness |
| Antihistamines | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme drowsiness • Causes temporary depression |
| Aspirin | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stomach and intestinal bleeding |
| High Blood Pressure Medicines | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dangerously lowered blood pressure |
| Narcotics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme slowing of brain activities • Breathing slowed down or stopped |
| Non-narcotic Pain Killers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stomach and intestinal irritation or bleeding |
| Sedatives & Tranquilizers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme slowing of brain activities • Breathing slowed down or stopped • Heart slowed or stopped |

Some parents allow their sons or daughters to drink a controlled amount on certain occasions, such as holidays and family functions. Still other parents believe it is all right for students to drink small amounts of alcohol, as long as he or she does so in a responsible fashion. **Your own orientation as a parent is a matter of your own values.** However, if you are going to permit your son or daughter to drink alcohol in certain contexts, then you must **be clear** about exactly what these contexts are and what constitutes responsible behavior. *****Studies consistently show that when parents permit their sons and daughters to drink they tend to drink more often and heavier outside the home.*****

Here are beliefs that many ● ● students hold which are NOT true:

It is NOT true that:

- Black coffee will help you become sober
- Exercise will help you become sober
- Eating food will help you become sober
- Taking a cold shower will help you become sober
- Fresh air will help you become sober
- A quick walk will help you become sober
- Going from dark lighting to bright lighting will help you become sober
- Drinking milk before drinking will allow you to drink as much as you want
- Putting a penny in your mouth will lower your BAC

These myths are important to dispel because students may decide to drive drunk after engaging in such activities, thinking that the activity has “sobered them up.” In fact, the activity only creates a temporary illusion of sobering up and in some instances increases drunkenness.

THE INITIAL CONVERSATION

Most teens have heard comments like “kids getting drunk is terrible” from other adults and from the media. You should NOT start your conversation with statements such as this. Keep your comments short and remember that you don't have to say everything. This is the beginning of a conversation. It probably is best to begin with a statement that conveys open-mindedness and then ask your son or daughter questions about his or her experiences. Talk about your own experiences and opinions and how they have changed over the years. As you tend to open-up, so will your son or daughter. Keep distinctions between facts and opinions: “My opinion is ... This opinion is based on these facts. This opinion is based on these experiences. This opinion is based on these observations.”

Ask your son or daughter what he or she thinks. Listen while trying to understand, without defensiveness. Suspend critical judgment. Even if your student says what you want to hear (e.g., “I don't drink now, let alone drink to get drunk”) don't think that this means you don't have to talk. Your goal is not just to reassure the student through talking but to help expand your student's thinking. You want to help him or her to deal with the range of experiences that your son or daughter is likely to encounter.

Try to think of thought provoking questions that can be asked in a supportive, non-threatening way. For example: Do you know kids who drink a lot? How has it affected them? Have you ever been offered alcohol by someone you knew? (If so) what did you say? (If not) what would you say? What if someone really pushed you? What would you say if they said...Is there another side to this view? Do you see any risks? Do you have any concerns? Ask questions; don't lecture! This is probably the single most important aspect of communication. People like to talk about themselves and their opinions. People like to explore logic and details. **They do not like to be told what to think!**

SETTING LIMITS

Some parents allow their sons or daughters to drink a controlled amount on certain occasions, such as holidays and family functions. Still other parents believe it is all right for teens to drink small amounts of alcohol, as long as he or she does so in a responsible fashion. **Your own orientation as a parent is a matter of your own values.** However, if you are going to permit your son or daughter to drink alcohol in certain contexts, then you must **be clear** about exactly what these contexts are and what constitutes responsible behavior. *****Studies consistently show that when parents permit their sons and daughters to drink they tend to drink more often and heavier outside the home.*****

REASONS WHY TEENS DRINK

It is important for parents to recognize that there will be “positive” reasons (at least from the student's perspective) for why they choose to drink. If parents only choose to focus discussions on the negative aspects of drinking, ignoring the positive aspects, they run the risk of losing credibility in their son's or daughter's eyes. Also, you need to help your son or daughter put these “positive” motivations in perspective so that they do not start to drink because of them. Here are some of the major ones that research has shown impact drinking behavior:

ADDS TO A CELEBRATION. Some teens believe that drinking is one way to celebrate a special occasion. For example, a friend may suggest to your son or daughter that they have a few beers after finishing an important assignment. It is important that you talk with your son or daughter about alternative ways of celebrating such as: (1) suggesting that your son or daughter go shopping for something special (e.g., clothes, music, sporting goods); (2) suggesting an outing, such as dinner, that would include a few special friends; and/or (3) offering to have friends over for a small dinner party (without alcohol). Encourage your student to tell you about significant things that happen in his or her life and then try to help him or her celebrate positively.

MAKES YOU FEEL SEXIER, ENHANCES SEXUALITY. Some teens believe that drinking alcohol adds to sexual experiences, but it is important to warn your son or daughter about the dangers in mixing alcohol and sex. First, because alcohol impairs judgment, teens may do things that they may regret later on, such as have sex with someone that, if sober, they would choose not to, or going further sexually than they are interested. Second, alcohol may decrease your son's or daughter's ability to prevent someone from forcing them to have sex. Finally, there is considerable scientific evidence to indicate that teens are much more likely to engage in unprotected intercourse if they have been drinking, thereby increasing the chances of an unintended pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease, such as AIDS.

LOWERS STRESS. Another reason teens give for drinking is that alcohol helps reduce worries. Parents should talk with their sons or daughters to find out about what worries them and help the student directly confront these worries in a realistic fashion. Parents can also point out the need to confront problems directly rather than avoid them and note that the problem does not go away because you drink (and, in fact, it may become worse).

MAKES IT EASIER TO EXPRESS FEELINGS/LESS INHIBITED. Another reason teens give for drinking is that they believe that alcohol helps make it easier to express feelings or talk with members of the opposite sex. Parents need to be sensitive to how difficult it is for teens to communicate in a new environment where they are unlikely to know anybody. Parents should point out that while often releasing inhibitions, alcohol actually could cloud judgments, making teens think that they are communicating better when, in fact, they are not. Often times alcohol interferes with communication about what is okay and what is not. This can lead to unwanted sexual advances, arguments, and sometimes fights.

PEER PRESSURE. Another important reason why teens drink is the influence of friends. Your son or daughter may feel pressured to drink. This pressure can be direct, as in the form of someone handing him or her a beer at a party, or it can be indirect, such as when he or she wants to be part of a group and that group experiments with alcohol. Parents **CANNOT** choose their student's friends for them. However, parents can help their son or daughter understand the dynamics of peer pressure and stress the importance of being his or her own person. Finally, parents and teens can talk about situations that could come up, such as a friend introducing alcohol at a party, so that teens can anticipate how to react.

FITTING IN. Often the highlight of the day after drinking are the post-party war stories about who drank the most shots, who blacked-out, and who had the worst hangover. Although some teens view these outcomes as badges of honor, our findings suggest that hangovers, black-outs, and heavy drinking are associated with accidents, rapes, unsafe sex, arrests, missed work, failed courses, and general victimization. It is important to understand that the data shows that both males and females who black-out from drinking are victims of sexual coercion.

HELPS MOOD. Many teens believe that alcohol will help them get in a better mood. They should know that it is normal to feel sad and stressed at times. They should also find alternate way to regulate their mood without alcohol or other drugs (e.g., caffeine). Exercise is always a good alternative to help improve one's mood. It is also important to explain to your son or daughter that the "high" from alcohol is accompanied by extreme lows as well.

SOMETHING TO DO. Some teens get bored and turn to alcohol as a means of getting excitement into their lives. To confront this, you can offer alternatives that your son or daughter can pursue. Some examples include getting involved in sports, hobbies, music, dance, games, reading, and school clubs. Teens could also become involved in volunteer activities that are associated with causes they really care about, such as protecting the environment or promoting literacy. This is a good way to meet others with similar interests and also to feel good about themselves. Many teens go to parties or have parties as a means of entertainment. Drinking frequently occurs in such settings and it is important that you provide suggestions on how teens can enjoy themselves without alcohol. The next page offers some simple suggestions for ways to enjoy a party without focusing on alcohol.

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS:



1. Try to meet three new people.
2. Try to find individuals who share common interests other than drinking.
3. Try to think about topics for conversation before going to the party to keep the focus of the conversation away from drinking or not drinking.
4. Never drink from a glass that has been out of your sight. Unfortunately, teens report having their drinks "drugged." These same teens report that while they were unconscious they were victims of sexual coercion.

WHY TEENS DO NOT DRINK

Many teens choose not to drink and the reasons they cite for not doing so can form the cornerstone of your conversations about the disadvantages of drinking. Before discussing these, we must interject a word of caution. If you try strong scare tactics with teens by inducing a great deal of fear about negative consequences, then your efforts might actually backfire. Research has shown that when faced with highly fear arousing information, some people will often “turn off” to it and not pay as much attention to it. This is because such information and thoughts are anxiety provoking and people are motivated to avoid anxiety. Why think about something when it is unpleasant to do so? In addition, strong scare tactics will often result in a loss of credibility. If you paint a picture based solely on the dire consequences of drinking and a student fails to see such consequences materialize when he, she, or a friend drinks, then the student will infer that you were wrong or that you were exaggerating the consequences. Discuss the negative consequences in a matter of fact, honest, and straightforward fashion.

DRINKING IS ILLEGAL. Teens generally know that drinking alcohol under the age of 21 is illegal. However, the general perception is that they will not get caught by the authorities and suffer any legal consequences. The fact is there is some truth to this perception. If, as a parent, you try to convey to your student the idea that there is a high probability of being caught when in fact there is not, then you will probably lose credibility. Instead of taking such a position, we have found it useful simply to remind teens about the many ways that they might get caught. Drinking at parties often leads to public disturbances and complaints to police, who will arrest all at the scene who are intoxicated.

What happens if authorities catch a student? This varies from community to community and judge to judge. However, there generally will be substantial costs in legal fees. There will be family embarrassment, since many such arrests are routinely reported in newspapers (not as headlines, of course, but in smaller sections labeled “Police Reports”). The student will also probably experience embarrassment, as he or she is publicly associated through the newspapers with getting caught for alcohol consumption. Prosecution in court may require the parent to take time off from work, thus costing the family money. Our experience has shown that teens rarely have thought about even half of the above consequences and that making them more aware of the implications of an arrest can have deterrent value.

DRINKING MAKES YOU SICK OR PASS OUT. Alcohol is an irritant to the lining of the digestive system. If too much is consumed, an individual will vomit and the effects on the system can be felt for days (frequently referred to as a “hangover”). Nobody at a party or a social function likes being around someone who is sick. This is complicated by the fact that the sickness one experiences often happens suddenly and with little warning.

DRINKING CAN LEAD TO SEXUAL ASSAULT. For females the risk of being sexually assaulted while intoxicated is very high. 85% of women who have been sexually assaulted were assaulted by someone they knew. Although your student most likely trusts the people he or she is around, and you may trust them too, situations can often turn dangerous in the presence of alcohol.

Teens who are drinking have less ability to control the situation around them, and often can't escape the threat of rape or assault. Communicate these risks to your son or daughter so that he or she understands the dangerous consequences that accompany binge drinking.

DRINKING CAN LEAD TO PREMATURE DEATH. Excessive alcohol consumption can have serious negative physical effects. Among other things, it causes damage to the liver, kidneys, brain, and the cardiovascular system, which are all long term in nature. There are however, countless instances of teens that have had fatal accidents or had unsafe sex and contracted a sexually transmitted disease following a single night of heavy drinking. Unfortunately, it is also not uncommon for individuals who vomit from heavy drinking to choke to death.

DRINKING MIGHT LEAD TO BEING AN ALCOHOLIC. Most teens have negative images of alcoholics and most do not want to become alcoholics. Most teens are also convinced that they can control their drinking and will not become alcoholics. Experts distinguish between three types of drinkers: social drinkers, problem drinkers, and alcoholics... Some individuals pass through stages from social drinking to problem drinking to alcoholism. For others, the addiction may occur after only a few drinks. Some teens are genetically disposed towards alcoholism and become problem drinkers relatively easily. Many teens cannot articulate the differences between a social and a problem drinker.

EXAMPLES OF SIGNS THAT MAY BE INDICATIONS OF A DRINKING PROBLEM INCLUDE:

- *needing* a drink to have fun
- forgetting what happened while drinking
- drinking to feel better about oneself
- bragging about tolerance
- drinking fast or "guzzling" drinks
- drinking in the morning
- using alcohol to help solve problems
- sneaking drinks
- finding reasons to continue drinking
- having difficulty stopping
- ability to socialize only when drinking

BINGE DRINKING: DRINKING TO GET DRUNK

BINGE DRINKING REFERS TO INDIVIDUALS WHO SET OUT TO GET DRUNK ON A GIVEN OCCASION BY DRINKING FIVE OR MORE DRINKS IN THE COURSE OF A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME (E.G., OVER THE COURSE OF TWO HOURS). Binge drinking is quite common in both high schools and colleges. Almost 30% of high school teens have engaged in bingeing. Many colleges report rates as high as 60%. There are times when individuals will plan to binge drink (e.g., “Let’s go out and get hammered!”). However, there are numerous occasions where individuals will only plan on having a drink or two, but get carried away by drinking games, parties that get out of hand or someone buys rounds of drinks, etc. **BINGE DRINKING HAS SERIOUS RISKS. CONSIDER THESE QUOTES FROM A SAMPLE OF TEENS:**

“I was having a great night. I drank at least 15 beers. Then I blacked out. This is not unusual for me. Another time, I became violent, smashed bottles and got in tons of trouble.”

“A girl I know got so drunk that a friend and I had to carry her for several blocks, trying to keep her from burning us with a cigarette. Since then, she has gotten as drunk every weekend. It has gotten her into some bad situations.”

“In a crowded party, I accidentally nudged someone. I apologized but the guy hit me anyway, making my mouth bleed.”

“My friend had a drinking contest with her boyfriend. They each had five shots of Wild Turkey, two beers, and then started a 'power hour' or 'century' - one shot of beer per minute for 60 minutes. My friend began falling down and looked ill. She laid down to go to sleep and began throwing up for two hours straight. She rolled over and almost choked in her vomit.”

These accounts sound shocking, but chances are they have happened to your son or daughter or someone he or she knows. These experiences alone should convince you of the potential risks of binge drinking. Binge drinkers are more likely to have been insulted by others, been confronted with unwanted sexual advances, been a victim of date rape or sexual assault, been in a serious argument or quarrel, been pushed, hit or assaulted, had one's property damaged, been in a situation where they had unplanned sexual activity, put themselves in situations where they are more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, been injured or had life threatening experiences, driven while intoxicated or rode in a car with an intoxicated driver.

You need to emphasize to your son or daughter how powerful a drug alcohol can be and how quickly binge drinking can lead to dangerous results. By discussing the reasons why teens drink, why teens choose not to drink, and the basis of good relationships, and by providing your son or daughter with skills on how to resist pressures from others, you will be helping your student develop the foundations that are necessary to reduce the probability of binge drinking.

RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT INDIVIDUALS TEND TO BINGE DRINK FOR MANY REASONS. SOME OF THESE INCLUDE:

- Binge drinkers tend to have generally positive expectations about the types of activities where binge drinking is more likely to take place (e.g., bars, fraternity/sorority parties). Some of the more commonly held beliefs include: I will be able to meet new people, I might meet potential sexual partners, and I will get to hang out with my friends.
- Binge drinkers tend to agree with many of the reasons why teens drink indicated earlier (e.g., drinking adds to a celebration, improves mood).
- Binge drinkers tend to disagree with many of the reasons why some teens do not drink indicated earlier (e.g., drinking makes you sick).
- Binge drinkers tend to associate with others who tend to binge drink (e.g., Everyone at my age is doing it, My friends will think that I am strange if I do not drink, It can't be that bad if everyone is drinking).
- Binge drinkers tend to believe that there is nothing else to do, but go get drunk on weekends and associate with others who hold the same belief.

DID YOU DRINK WHEN YOU WERE A TEEN?

It is highly likely that in the course of your discussions with your son or daughter, you will be asked if you ever drank as a teen. The fact is that most parents did drink in their youth, which creates a dilemma. If you answer no, then you are not being honest with your son or daughter. If you answer yes, then you are being hypocritical. At the same time you are telling your son or daughter not to drink, you admit that you did. You are, in an indirect way, saying it is permissible to drink, because you did it. And if you drank as a teen, how can you turn around and punish your son or daughter for drinking? How should you answer questions about your own drinking as a teen?

We believe that honesty is important and that you should not lie to your student. Ultimately this can undermine effective communication. Some parents establish a “ground rule” at the start of their discussion: They will talk about anything but will not answer questions about their own use of drugs or alcohol as a student. The parent tells the student that this rule does not mean that the parent drank alcohol as a teenager nor does it mean that the parent did not. Rather, the parent's behavior as a student is not relevant to a careful consideration of the issues surrounding the student's current use of alcohol. This strategy works well in some families but not others.

Teens may be convinced that their parents are hiding something and resent the fact that the parent won't talk about it. How can the parent expect the student to talk about his or her behavior when the parent refuses to talk about the parent's behavior as a student? An alternative approach is to admit to use, but to state in unambiguous terms that it was a mistake. Use your experiences as an opportunity to discuss some of the negative things that happened. Relate how drinking led to an embarrassing moment or an unpleasant consequence for the

parent, making salient the fact that drinking has negative consequences that the parent has personally experienced. Stress that just because the parent behaved foolishly and was lucky enough to escape serious consequences does not mean that the same fortune will befall the student.

Unfortunately, there is no good scientific data about how best to handle this issue and psychologists are divided on what they recommend. We suggest that you use your own judgment about what you think will work best given your own past and your knowledge of your son or daughter. Either way we suggest being prepared before you have these conversations.

WARNING SIGNS OF A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

Most parents underestimate the drinking activity of their sons or daughters. If you think your son or daughter might have a drinking problem, here are some suggestions for ways in which you can help:

- Do not turn your back on the problem.
- Be calm when discussing the problem with your son or daughter.
- Let your son or daughter know that you are concerned and are willing to help.
- Do not make excuses or cover up for your son or daughter.
- Do not take over your student's responsibilities but provide him or her with the means to take responsibility for himself or herself.
- Do not argue with your son or daughter if she or he is drunk.
- If your child stays out late, stay awake for them when possible, to show you care and are interested in what they are doing.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Drunk driving is a serious problem among young people today. It is extremely important that you also talk with your teen about drunk driving when he or she first begins to drive. Such topics can be discussed naturally in the broader context of safe driving practices. It is also important to understand that most parents underestimate the amount of drinking and driving and riding with drinking drivers that their teens engage in. Many teens engage in one of these activities within several months of receiving their driver's license.

DETERMINANTS OF TEEN DRUNK DRIVING

There are many reasons why teens drink and drive. We cannot emphasize enough how important it is that you encourage your teen to think carefully about all of the issues we discuss in relation to drunk driving. Our research has indicated that each of these areas is important.

Chances of being in an accident or arrested.

Although many teens hear warnings about drinking and driving and the risks of getting into an accident or arrested, most teens believe that these things will never happen to them. Our research has found that teens who drive after drinking think that their chances of getting in an accident or getting stopped by the police are minimal. Consider the following statistics:

Research indicates:

- Each year approximately 15,000 to 20,000 individuals are killed in alcohol related accidents. This is almost one person every 30 minutes.
- It is estimated that 560,000 individuals are seriously injured in alcohol related accidents (about 1 per minute, every hour, every day).
- Teens make up a large percentage of the number of individuals killed in drunk driving accidents. Forty percent of all teen deaths are due to alcohol related accidents.

Such abstract information, while useful to discuss, does not always strike a chord with teens. Many teens have utmost confidence in their driving skills and while others may experience accidents due to drunk driving, the belief is that it won't happen to them because they are good drivers. We have found that this mistaken belief system can be weakened by helping teens appreciate the effects that alcohol has on the body and how this relates to the skills involved in

driving. Driving safely involves many skills that are often taken for granted, including

- estimating stopping time and stopping distance
- estimating distance between cars
- adjusting eyes to headlights and bright lights
- concentrating on and performing several tasks at one time

It is not uncommon for a teen who has been drinking to think about how drunk he or she is in terms of the following: Can I see okay? Do things seem blurry? Am I slurring my speech? Can I walk a straight line? **Alcohol alters the brain's ability to make accurate estimates about how each of the body's functions are working.** Your teen may think that he or she is walking a straight line, but in fact is not. Your teen may think that he or she is speaking clearly, but again speech may be slurred. Worse yet, these questions have little to do with many of the physical tasks involved in driving.

Lawyers and the legal system.

There are many individuals who think that being arrested or in an accident as a result of driving after drinking is merely an inconvenience and that a good lawyer can always get them out of any trouble. This is simply not true, yet such individuals are more likely to drive drunk. Your teen needs to know that it is not easy to beat the legal system. Lawyers are expensive and they can not perform magic. If a teen was driving drunk, then they *are* going to face the consequences and even the most skilled lawyer will not make it any easier. Indeed, there is no way that a lawyer can rid the suffering of families where someone has been killed or seriously injured as a result of a drunk driving accident.

Severity of an accident.

When teens are asked about what might happen if they were to get into a drunk driving accident, many say that there is a good chance they could be killed or that someone else could be killed. However, not all teens share this opinion. There are teens who minimize the likely severity of a drunk driving accident and who think that, for them, such an accident would only be a "fender-bender." Our research has shown that these are the teens who are the most likely to drive after drinking. You should explain that there are people who unrealistically assume that most drunk driving accidents are minor and that these individuals are at greater risk of driving drunk.

Driving Aggression.

Many teens who drive drunk are aggressive drivers. They show little patience for others on the road, they drive aggressively, often speeding and honking their horn a great deal, and they often express anger at the way others drive. These emotions play an important role in the driving practices of your teen. Some teens have a difficult time controlling their emotions and vent their feelings on the road. Such teens are more likely to take risks while driving. These teens also

fail to appreciate that when they drive, they share the road with other people, not just other drivers. Teach your teen that it is important to be considerate of other drivers. People don't drive poorly on purpose. For many people, driving is a difficult task and they are trying their hardest to get from one place to another place without incident. The last thing that these individuals need is someone yelling at them, cursing them, or making them even more nervous about their driving.

Long lasting effects.

As we have mentioned, most teens have a "here and now" perspective and do not consider future consequences. However, many of the physical and legal consequences of drunk driving are long term. Teens who fail to consider these long term consequences are more likely to drive drunk. A conviction can negatively affect their employment prospects in the immediate and the distant future, their ability to go to college due to the admission policies of certain colleges, and their car insurance rates (and access to a car, as a result of unaffordable insurance). Sometimes the injuries are severe and last a lifetime. The teen could find himself or herself permanently handicapped or without the use of vital bodily function, making it impossible to pursue an active, healthy life as an adult. The guilt associated with killing or maiming another person may haunt them for the rest of their lives and is an extremely difficult thing to deal with.

Alternatives to drunk driving.

Suppose your teen was generally opposed to drunk driving, but she decided to drink at a party. She did not intend to drink, but ended up doing so. Now she needs to drive home. What should your teen do? This is a very important scenario to consider. Our research shows that many teens drive drunk because they see no alternatives to doing so. There are, of course, many alternatives, such as taking a taxi, asking a non-drinking friend for a ride, calling someone at home for a ride, or staying overnight. But most teens view these alternatives as unacceptable for various reasons. For example, many teens express embarrassment at having to admit to being drunk because it might make them look bad to their friends. Some teens do not view calling a taxi as a viable alternative because they fear the driver may take advantage of them if he senses the teen is drunk. If parents have threatened punishment for drinking, a teen will be highly unlikely to view calling home as an acceptable alternative to driving after drinking.

It's a Fact:

Our research shows that many teens drive drunk because they see no alternatives to doing so.

*****Work out an acceptable and viable plan with your teen for what to do in such circumstances! *****

There is one factor to consider when thinking about alternatives to drunk driving. Some parents believe they might be unwittingly encouraging their teen to drink. According to this view, risking one's life by driving drunk is a deterrent to drinking alcohol. Obviously the issues involved are complex. Parents need to convey a strong sense of disapproval for drinking and for driving drunk and to provide extensive reasons for this disapproval in such a way that the teen understands the

parental perspective. Parents also need to provide their teen with the resources to cope with problems, such as being in a situation where the teen is drunk and is the primary driver. It does not have to be the case that providing alternatives represents an implicit approval of drinking. If parents are clear about their reasons and their motives, then developing constructive alternatives to drunk driving can be highly effective.

One strategy that is becoming more common is the "designated driver" strategy. If a teen is going to a party with friends where they know they will be drinking, then one of the group is designated as the "driver." This person agrees not to drink alcohol at the party and drives everyone home. Teens then take turns being the designated driver. ***Our own experience is that it is **difficult** to get teens to take the role of being a designated driver and, in the end, the teen must rely on the behavior of another individual, which itself is **risky**.***

RIDING WITH A DRUNK DRIVER

Even if your teen never drinks and drives, they may be faced with a situation where they have to decide whether or not to ride with someone who has been drinking. This is just as dangerous as driving drunk. As a rule your teen should not get into a car with someone who has been drinking and should be knowledgeable about effective alternatives (e.g., calling a taxi, asking someone else for a ride home). You should develop an explicit agreement with your teen that he or she *never* rides with someone who has been drinking. Again, it is almost impossible to judge how drunk or sober someone is once they have been drinking, so it is best not to ride with someone regardless of the number of drinks they have had or how sober they seem to be. The teen should be aware that techniques for "sobering up" (e.g., drinking coffee) do not work (see our earlier discussion) and that they should not rely on these to make a friend a "safe and sober" driver. Make sure your teen always has enough money for a taxi ride or for public transportation. Encourage them to ride with other non-drinking friends or to call home.

PREVENTING A FRIEND FROM DRIVING

Your teen may also be faced with a situation where his or her best friend has been drinking and intends to drive. In these cases, your teen should try to stop his or her friend from driving. Many teens are reluctant to do so because they feel that it might prove to be embarrassing or that an argument might ensue, or even a physical confrontation. Our research suggests that less resistance will result if:

- **teens do not try to take their friend's keys away**
- **teens try to arrange for a friend to drive**
- **teens arrange for their friend to stay over**
- **teens try to reason with their friend**

Of course there may be a time when these might not work. Emphasize to your teen that he or she should be persistent, calm, tolerant of verbal abuse, and not take the situation personally.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information about alcohol and drug use in teens, you can contact the following organizations for many useful materials:

The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
<http://www.health.org>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

NIAAA College Drinking Changing the Culture
<http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov>

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
<http://www.ncadd.org>

Research Society on Alcoholism
<http://www.rsoa.org>

Alcoholics Anonymous
<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org>

Adult Children of Alcoholics
<http://www.adultchildren.org>

BACCHUS Peer Education Network and GAMMA
<http://bacchusgamma.org>

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP)
<http://prevention.samhsa.gov/>

Safe and Drug-Free Schools
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS>

Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention
<http://www.edc.org/hec/>

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
<http://www.madd.org>

Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)
<http://www.saddonline.com>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
<http://www.samhsa.gov/>

- Estimates suggest that 9 out of 10 senior high school teens experiment with alcohol
- 4 out of 10 drink regularly
- Almost 2 out of 10 will be a problem drinker or alcoholic.
- The average 14 year old consumes numerous gallons of beer, liquor, and wine each year.
- Adolescents are more likely to develop alcohol problems than adults.

You *can* assist your son or daughter in avoiding problems such as excessive drinking and drunk driving while at the same time helping your child make a smooth transition into high school and the adult world!

Research shows that the authoritarian approach is counterproductive and can actively harm the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children.

If you think your teen might have a drinking problem, here are some suggestions for ways in which you can help:

1. Do not turn your back on the problem.
2. Be calm when discussing the problem with your teen.
3. Let your teen know that you are concerned and are willing to help.
4. Do not make excuses or cover up for your teen.
5. Do not take over your teen's responsibilities but provide him or her with the means to take responsibility for himself or herself.
6. Do not argue with your teen if she or he is drunk.
7. If your child stays out late, stay awake for them when possible, to show you care and are interested in what they are doing.

Research shows that many teens drive drunk because they see no alternatives to doing so.
 * Work out an acceptable and viable plan with your teen for what to do in such circumstances!

Give your teen choices. Self esteem is enhanced if you perceive that you control your life. Where possible, allow your teen to make choices for himself or herself. Don't always be telling the teen what to do, especially for more minor decisions. Try to let your teen be his or her own person.