

Underage drinking is common in the United States. In fact, alcohol remains the number one most abused drug by teenagers. The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 29% of American high school students had consumed alcohol in the last 30 days and of those that drank, the majority binge drank. In this newsletter, you will learn more about why underage alcohol consumption is particularly concerning, why it is important to have conversations with your child about alcohol use, and tips for having those conversations. Parental behavior and communication can delay early initiation of alcohol consumption. Your child IS listening!!

Alcohol and Its Influence on Teens



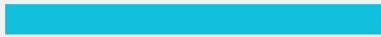
Public health experts generally agree that America has a drinking problem. Pre-Covid data (January 2020) indicated that Americans were drinking more and that binge drinking was on the rise. And since the pandemic hit, several studies have suggested a marked increase in alcohol consumption. Nationally alcohol sales climbed 26% between March and June of 2020 compared to the prior year (Nielsen Corp.). Youth in the United States are 96 times more likely to see an advertisement for alcohol than they are to see an ad discouraging underage drinking. References to alcohol are an accepted part of a teenager's everyday experience. Studies have found that the average 11-year-old is exposed to about 3 advertisements for alcohol each day, or over a thousand each year. Also, it estimated that kids receive about 35 references to alcohol and drug use for every hour they listen to music. Not only are young people bombarded by references in the media, but they commonly see the trusted adults in their lives imbibing. All of this can be confusing.

Alcohol and the Developing Brain

There is a notion that alcohol is "safer" because it is legal. This is a common misconception, but especially among teens. So, talking to young people about the impact of alcohol use on their developing brain is critical. Drinking is particularly harmful to teens because their brain is developing well into their twenties. Alcohol use impairs learning and memory. Studies show that adolescent drinkers perform worse in school. Binge drinking, or drinking 4-5 drinks in one single occasion, is especially dangerous for teens as their brains are more susceptible to long-term damage. In addition, alcohol use before age 15, increases the risk of developing substance use disorder as an adult by 5 times.

Underage drinking can "wire" the brain for alcoholism

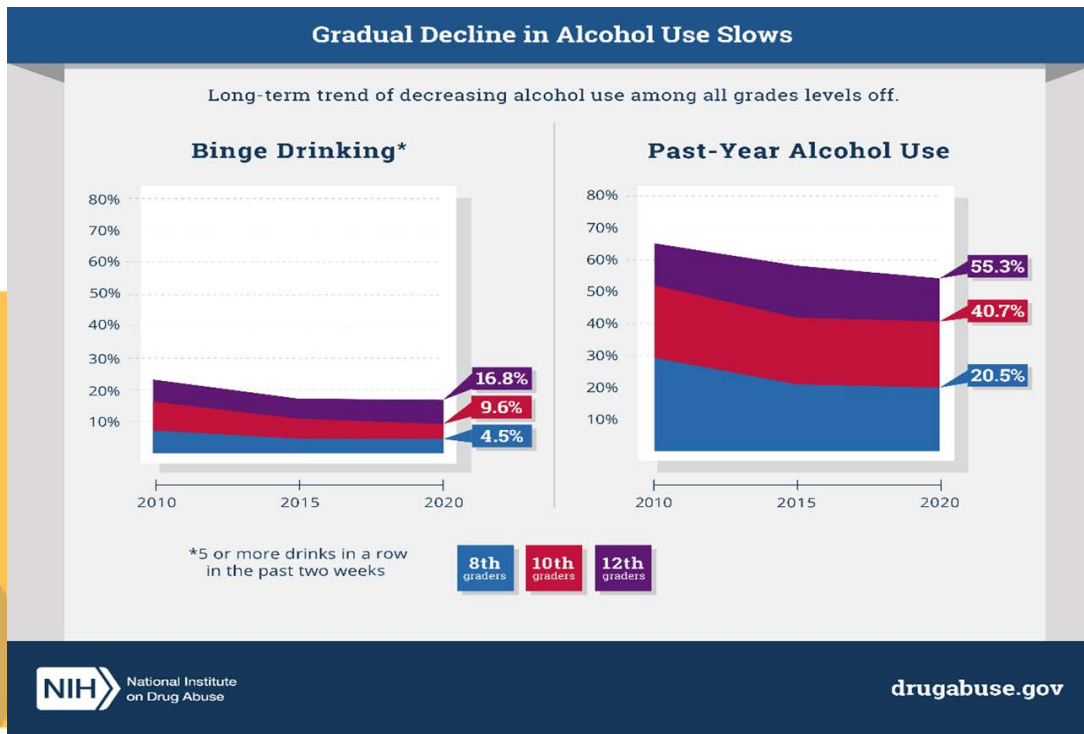
Chances of becoming an alcoholic

40%  Kids who begin drinking before **age 15**

7%  Someone who waits until **age 21**

Current Trends in Teen Use

For several years, teen use of alcohol had been trending down. However, that seems to now be leveling off. Here is the latest data (Monitoring the Future) from December 2020. You can see that by 12th grade over 55% of students report having used alcohol in the past year. It will be important for us to continue to watch this data as we come out of the pandemic, when students spent the majority of their time at home, and often alcohol is readily available.



Trends to Watch



Home Delivery: New laws allowing for the sale of to-go cocktails during COVID may be further contributing to easy access to alcohol by minors. Few third-party delivery services check to see if the delivery recipient is 21 or over, or the delivery may be contactless and simply left at the door. Often these drinks arrive in basic containers that don't necessarily indicate that they contain something alcoholic.



Alcopops: Nearly two-thirds of underage drinkers have consumed what is called an alcopop. Alcopops closely resemble soda or energy drinks and the sweetness of these drinks may appeal to younger drinkers, more than the taste of wine or beer. These drinks are often packaged in what could look simply like a can of soda and are being marketed as a transition from soda to alcohol. Alcopops can be very strong and may contain up to 12% ABV (alcohol by volume).



Alcohol on Social Media: When popular photos on social media show alcohol use or other risky behaviors, this could lead teens to make bad choices. In addition to posted pictures that glamorize alcohol use, many social media apps offer features where users can add a filter that depicts alcohol to their photos. This might look like clinking champagne glasses or a brand-name filter, such as Budweiser filters around Super Bowl time. Some teens may just see this as something fun to add to their photos, but studies have shown that the more alcohol related posts a teen sees, the more likely they are to drink alcohol.

Additional
Online
Resources:

<https://candorhealthed.org/parent-information/family-resources/resources-drug-education/alcohol-information/>
<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/>
<https://drugfree.org/>

Illinois Social Host Law

It is important to know that the Illinois Social Host Law, passed in 2013, holds adults accountable for underage drinking that occurs in the home.

- If you allow or host a party at your house and provide alcohol to people under age 21 (or if you know or should have known that they are drinking alcohol), you are guilty of a Class A misdemeanor. This will result in a fine. Note that you are held responsible regardless of whether or not you are the one who provides the alcohol or not or whether or not you are home at the time of the incident.
- If a minor who was drinking at your house injures or kills someone, you are guilty of a Class 4 felony. This could result in both a fine and/or jail time.
- You will not be guilty of violating the law if you are the first one to call police to help remove the underage drinkers and stop the gathering. If the police show up after a complaint from a neighbor and you ask for assistance to stop the gathering you will be found guilty.
- In addition, depending on local community ordinances, you may also be held responsible for the costs of emergency services/law enforcement that respond to a call, attorney fees and other costs associated.



Tips for Prevention

- Establish Clear Rules**
Setting clear, specific rules is the foundation for the parental effort in prevention. Create the rules with your child and enforce them consistently.
- Build the Parent/Child Relationship**
Eat meals together when you can. Remove electronics from meals, bedrooms, and family activities. Take an interest in your child's interests.
- Promote Healthy Activities**
Fight off the dreaded "I'm bored." Help your child get involved in physical activities, community activities, arts or a part-time job.
- Set the Example**
Drink in moderation, use a designated driver, and adopt healthy coping strategies.
- Know Their Friends**
Pay attention to who your child is hanging out with and take the opportunity to introduce yourself to their parents.
- Keep Track of Alcohol**
For kids, the most common source of alcohol is home.
- Be Their Way Out**
Let your child know that they can call you anytime to come get them or when in a peer pressure situation. They can use you as an excuse for not using alcohol.

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What are some tips for talking to your child about alcohol?

- **Give them the facts and start early**
Answer their questions honestly as they arise. Let them know how alcohol impacts their developing brain, and the risks associated with early use and binge drinking.
- **Be approachable and initiate conversations on topic**
Teens often become defensive when they think a lecture is coming. Having conversations with your child in the car can sometimes be more comfortable. Talking about it once though is not enough.
- **Use news or stories as a way to start conversations**
When something related to alcohol is in the news use it as a way to start the conversation. Perhaps share a story about something that has happened to you or a friend or neighbor.
- **Share your values**
The number one reason kids say that they do not use alcohol is because their parents will be disappointed. Communicate your stance on underage drinking.
- **Ask them what they know**
With social media and the Internet at their fingertips, chances are they may be seeing more references to alcohol than you think, and often these vehicles glamourize it. What have they seen or heard from classmates or friends?



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