

Underage Drinking: The Importance of Parents in Prevention Efforts

According to the CDC, alcohol is the most commonly used substance of abuse among America's youth. In 2014 Nebraska youth reported the following (2014 NE Youth Risk Behavior Survey):

- 51.7% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life
- 13.7% had their first drink, other than a few sips, before age 13
- 22.7% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days
- 14.3% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days
- Liquor (rum, vodka, whiskey) is the most commonly consumed type of alcohol consumed by NE youth- 42.1%
- The most common place alcohol is consumed is within a home, where 3 in 5 students report that they usually drink at another person's home and almost 1 in 4 report that they usually drink within their own home

Excessive drinking is responsible for more than 4,300 deaths among underage youth each year. This alone should drive communities to instill practices and policies that reduce youth access to alcohol. While losing a youth to an alcohol related death is the most costly consequence to underage drinking, youth who drink alcohol are more likely to experience:

- School problems, such as higher absences and lower grades
- Social problems, such as lack of participation in youth activities
- Legal problems
- Unwanted, unplanned and unprotected sexual activity
- Higher risk for suicide and homicide
- Alcohol-related car crashes and other unintentional injuries.

Despite the use of alcohol amongst youth and the risks associated with such use, there is hope. Everyone can play a role in preventing underage drinking but parents are pivotal players in reducing alcohol consumption amongst youth.

83% of teens say their parents are the leading influence in their decision to not use. The power of parents is something that families should not take for granted in efforts to prevent underage drinking. It is critical for parents to have discussions with their children on alcohol use and the risks of underage drinking. By talking with children early and often, parents can play a role in their child's choice to not drink. MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), offers the following tips to parents:

- Begin talking together specifically about alcohol
- Listen to your child's concerns respectfully, and use positive parenting techniques



- Set clear no-alcohol use rules, and agree on appropriate consequences for breaking those rules
- Discuss short-term and long-term risks of underage alcohol use
- Help your child plan how to deal with social pressure to drink alcohol
- Keep track of where your child is, and with whom, on a regular basis.
- Make sure your child is in a monitored, alcohol-free environment
- Support school and community policies that keep alcohol away from underage youth

Many communities likewise have prevention coalitions in which parents can become involved. Advocating for public laws and institutional policies can lead to larger community level change in efforts to reduce youth access to alcohol. Stricter penalties for fake i.d.'s, social host laws (hosting drinking parties for people underage) and zero tolerance policies for underage drinking and driving are examples of environmental level initiatives that can help prevent underage drinking.

For additional information on preventing underage drinking, visit <http://www.talkaboutalcohol.org>.

References: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; <http://www.madd.org>; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2014