

National Public Education Campaign Under Way To Reduce Underage Drinking

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(NAPSA)—Alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth. A higher percentage of young people, ages 12 to 20, use alcohol (29 percent) than use tobacco (24 percent) or illicit drugs (14 percent), making underage drinking a leading public health problem in the United States. A new national effort to encourage parents to speak with their children about this critical problem is under way. Some people find it hard to believe that by the time they reach eighth grade, 41 percent of adolescents have had at least one drink, and almost 20 percent report having been drunk. It's also a fact that adults who had first used alcohol before age 15 are five times more likely to report dependence on or abuse of alcohol than adults who first used it at age 21 or older. In addition to its negative impact on health, alcohol use among youth is strongly correlated with violence, risky sexual behavior, poor academic performance, driving incidents and other harmful behaviors.

Yet many parents do not see drinking as a top-of-mind issue. To help bring this issue to the forefront, a new campaign is encouraging parents to speak with their children about the negative effects of alcohol to delay the onset of, and ultimately to prevent, underage drinking.

The campaign, developed in partnership with the Ad Council, is aimed at the parents of middle schoolers, particularly those whose children have not started drinking. Parents need to realize they have more influence over their children than they may know. Sure, kids spend a lot of time with friends, television, music, magazines and the Web. But they are also tuned in to what their parents say and do. Parents' disapproval of underage alcohol use is one of the key reasons youths choose not to drink. Underage drinking is not inevitable.

For too long underage drinking has been accepted as a rite of passage. Far too many young people, along with their friends and families, have paid the price. Any use of alcohol for teens involves risk—any use, not just binge drinking or



Underage drinking is a problem that all parents should discuss with their children.

drinking and driving. Alcohol can affect the developing adolescent brain. And we've learned the earlier a person is introduced to alcohol, the greater the chances are that that person will develop an alcohol problem in his or her youth and/or adulthood.

We must change attitudes toward teen drinking from acceptance to abstinence and recognize the importance of parents talking to their children early and often about alcohol, especially before they've started drinking. We must replace an environment that all too often enables underage alcohol use with an environment that discourages it.

Children need information to make good decisions. Don't wait until a problem arises to talk with them about drinking alcohol. Be sure to talk with them about the law, how alcohol affects the body, and how peer pressure can sometimes make it difficult to do the right thing. Discuss your personal beliefs with your children. Sharing your values and family history regarding alcohol helps create an environment of trust and understanding.

Get involved in your community and your child's school.

For more information, including tips on talking with your children about alcohol, or to order the free booklet "Start Talking Before They Start Drinking," visit www.stopalcoholabuse.gov or call 1-800-729-6686.

SAMHSA, a public health agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the lead federal agency for improving the quality and availability of substance abuse prevention, addiction treatment and mental health services in the United States.