

# the Parent resource

Information For  
Parents Of  
Teens & Preteens





ORANGE COUNTY MAYOR  
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Dear Orange County Parents,

Welcome to the third edition of our parent magazine focused on raising healthy and drug-free youth. As the mother of four children, I know first-hand the joys of parenting, and remember fondly the many moments of achievement and celebration that accompanied the development of my children. Equally momentous were the challenges.

For parents and families who are struggling with teen drug and alcohol use, we want to help by providing the tools and information to help guide vulnerable teens and adolescents in the right direction. In addition to programs, training and prevention strategies, we want to arm our parents with facts and research, so they can make informed choices for their families. For example, studies have shown that the number one deterrent to teen drug and alcohol use is parental disapproval - precisely the type of research and data that parents need to know.

Keeping our young people on the road to becoming healthy and productive adults is important to all of us. To assist in this effort and thanks to the Orange County Partnership for Success, this magazine contains the latest alcohol-related research, facts, and information to keep your kids healthy and alcohol free.

According to the 2014 Orange County Youth Substance Abuse Survey, approximately 23.5% of high school and 8% of middle school students reported they have consumed alcohol in the past 30 days. Combined results indicate 17% of students have used alcohol in the past 30 days, which is 3.5% lower than the statewide average. The 2014 survey also marks the lowest percentage of underage alcohol use among Orange County students since the survey began in 2000. Although alcohol still remains the most abused drug by our youth, this is a notable improvement and I would like to extend my thanks to our school system, community providers, law enforcement, parents, and mentors who are making a difference in their lives. Prevention remains our greatest defense as we continue to reduce underage drinking in Orange County.

I also want to take this opportunity to highlight the University of Central Florida Psychology Department's Expectancy Challenge Alcohol Literacy Curriculum (ECALC) for parents. The program was launched last year and exposes the myths about alcohol, as well as provides information on expectancy effects and the physical effects of alcohol. To learn more, we encourage you to view the parent program website at <http://ecalc.ucfretrolab.org/parent/>.

We all want healthy, drug-free children and I hope this information provides you with the resources that can assist you and your family in achieving this goal. If you need any additional information regarding underage drinking or other drug-related issues, I would encourage you to contact the Orange County Drug Free Office or visit the website at [www.drugfreecoalition.org](http://www.drugfreecoalition.org).

Thank you for helping create one of the best communities in which to live, work, and raise a family!

Sincerely,

Orange County Mayor

Orange County Board of County Commissioners  
S. Scott Boyd, District 1  
Bryan Nelson, District 2

Pete Clarke, District 3  
Jennifer Thompson, District 4

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- Most parents talk to their kids about drinking two years too late. Age 8 is not too early.
- What parents may not realize is that children say parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink

# Teen brain development and alcohol

**R**ESearch shows that alcohol affects a developing teen brain differently than an adult brain. "The brain goes through dynamic changes during adolescence, and alcohol can seriously damage long- and short-term growth processes" (American Medical Association *Fact Sheet*, 2003).

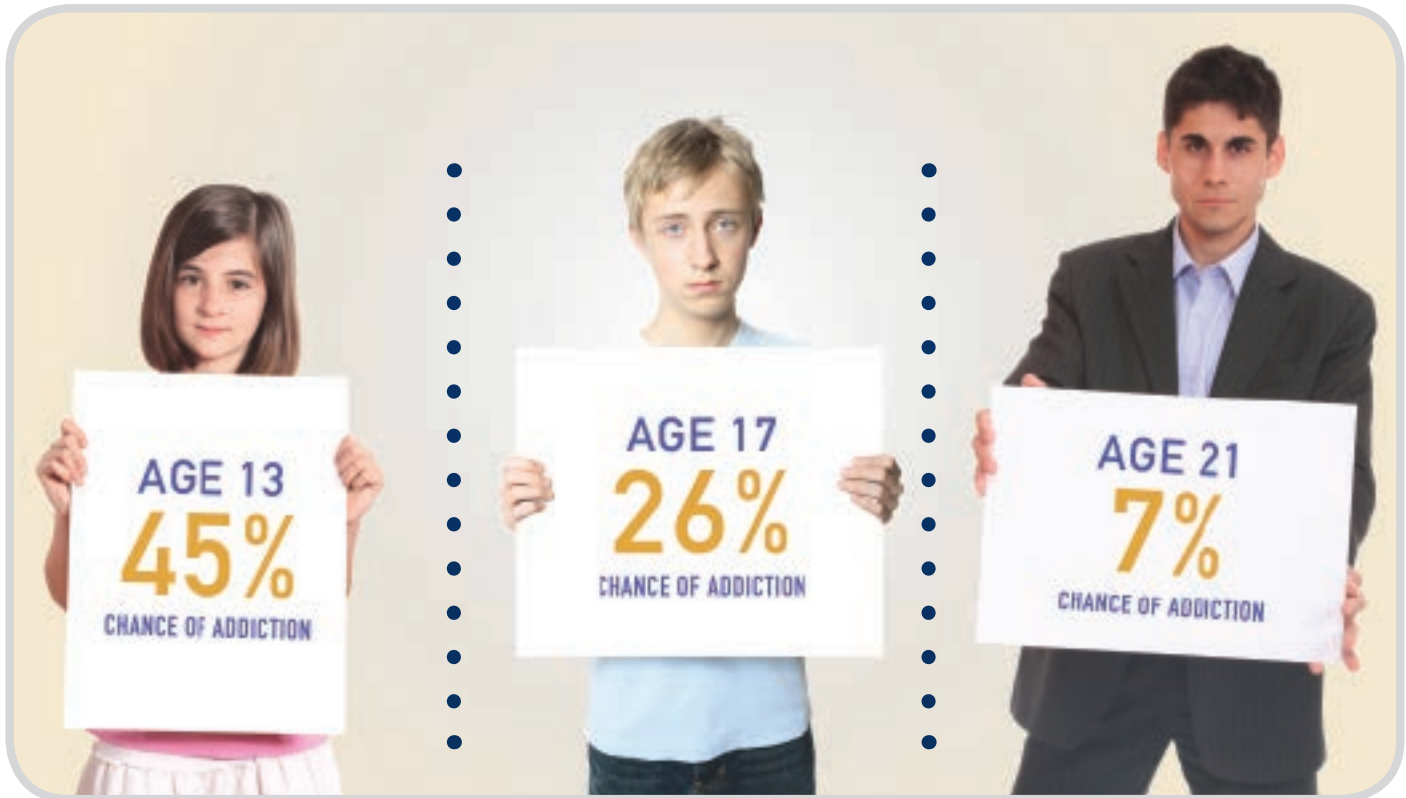
Alcohol use may impair memory, learning, decision-making and impulse control; and it greatly increases the risk of addiction. In addition, alcohol use can cause young people to develop social problems, have poor judgment, get into trouble, do poorly in school and experience failure in achieving lifelong goals.

To compound this problem, research shows that parents generally underestimate the extent of teen drinking and its negative consequences. Thirty-one percent of youths who said they had been drunk in the past year were said by their parents to be non-drinkers. Others may view underage drinking as inevitable, but it isn't. To be alcohol-free, a teen needs parents who are trained in **BONDING** (creating a warm, loving relationship), setting **BOUNDARIES** (clear, firm rules about no-underage alcohol use) and **MONITORING** (knowing where your kids are and making sure they stay in an alcohol- and drug-free social environment at all times).

## Alcohol affects a teen brain differently than an adult brain.

- The brain's hippocampus (responsible for learning and memory) can be **10% smaller** in underage drinkers.
- It can actually cause serious damage to the still-developing adolescent brain (10-21 years).

# Increased risk of addiction



**T**HE BRAIN REWARDS positive actions with feelings of pleasure so we want to repeat them. We remember “feel-good” brain chemicals, or neurotransmitters, which connect the pleasure to the thing we enjoyed. Alcohol hijacks our brain’s pleasure-reward system by tricking the brain into generating pleasure-reward feelings from a harmful chemical instead of a real experience.

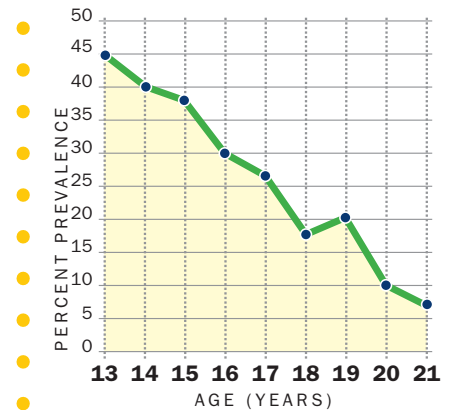
- If teens continue drinking, the brain changes and adapts to the presence of alcohol and soon they need more and more alcohol to create the same amount of pleasure.
- Because the teen brain produces an

abundance of dopamine, it can go rapidly from liking, to wanting, to needing alcohol, programming it for alcoholism, also damage the brain’s ability to sense pleasure from normal, healthy things and experiences — leaving a young person feeling “flat” about things he/she previously enjoyed.

- The brain’s hippocampus (responsible for learning and memory) can be 10% smaller in underage drinkers.
- Youth who drink before age 15 are 4x more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21.
- Children say parental disapproval of underage drinking is #1 reason for not drinking.

## Alcohol-dependence

BASED ON AGE DRINKING STARTS



AGE (YEARS)

SOURCE: Grant, BF and Dawson, DA.

Journal of Substance Abuse 9:103-110,1997

**If your family has a history of alcoholism, your children need to know that they are at a greater risk for problem drinking.**

# Parents

## are the #1 reason kids don't drink

**E** DUCATION ALONE is not enough to deter teens from drinking as they enter difficult social transitions to adulthood, because there are many pressures and opportunities to drink. Parents who are actively involved can have a powerful influence on their child's decision to remain alcohol-free.

Teen perceptions of parental disapproval are great deterrents. What parents may not realize is that children say parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink.

Research indicates that children are less likely to drink when their parents are involved in their lives and when they and their parents report feeling close to each other. Family conflict and lack of bonding are associated with an increased risk of drinking. Mixed messages, and unclear rules and expectations also leave children more vulnerable to underage drinking.



### How parents can help their children remain ALCOHOL-FREE

- 1 Explain the risks**  
Learn and explain the risks of underage drinking. Emphasize that drinking alcohol is not a "rite of passage" but a dangerous drug for a teen brain.
- 2 Talk early and often**  
In Orange County, surveys indicate some youths binge drink in the sixth grade, and a few may start even earlier.
- 3 Set clear rules**  
Set clear rules about no alcohol use. Be specific: "Absolutely no underage drinking in our family."
- 4 Know your children's friends**  
Get to know your children's friends and their parents. Help them choose friends who support your family rules.
- 5 Monitor children's activities**  
Always know where your children are, whom they are with and what they are doing. For example: "If alcohol is at a party, call me and I'll come and get you."
- 6 Make alcohol unavailable**  
Ensure that alcohol is not available to your child at home or from others when your child is away. Ensure that your children's social environment is alcohol-free.
- 7 Be involved**  
Develop close bonding experiences and have daily positive interactions with your child. Express love often.
- 8 Stay in contact**  
Studies show children are more likely to drink between the hours of 3:00-6:00 pm, when unsupervised by parents. Give your kids a call.
- 9 Eat dinner together**  
Studies show that kids who eat dinner with their family 5-7 times per week are 33 percent less likely to drink alcohol underage.

### START TALKING BEFORE THEY START DRINKING

Most parents talk to their kids about drinking 2 years too late. Age 8 is not too early.

Sharing values and family history regarding alcohol will create an environment of trust and understanding.

#### If parents drink, they should:

Be clear that they do not want their children to drink alcohol until they are 21 years old and then only in moderation.

Tell their children that some people should not drink alcohol beverages at all. These include:

- Children and adolescents
- Individuals of any age who cannot restrict their drinking to moderate levels.
- Women who are pregnant.
- People who plan to drive or take part in activities that require attention or skill.
- People using prescription and over-the-counter medications.

#### If parents don't drink, they should

- Explain their reasons for not drinking, whether they are religious, health-related or due to family history.
- Encourage children to talk about concerns and questions about drinking.
- Be clear that they do not want their children to drink.
- Explain that when their children are 21, if they should decide to drink, they should do so in moderation.

# brain research

## and the effects of alcohol

The **brain** is the major organ of the central nervous system and the control center for all the body's voluntary and involuntary activities. It is responsible for everything we think, feel, see, say and do. The **brainstem** controls vital body functions, such as breathing and digestion. The **cerebellum** maintains posture, coordination of body movement and provides long-term storage for memories of how to do things that involve our body — like riding a bike. The **cerebrum**, which consists of the right and left cerebral hemispheres, is the site of most conscious and intelligent activities.

### Brain plasticity

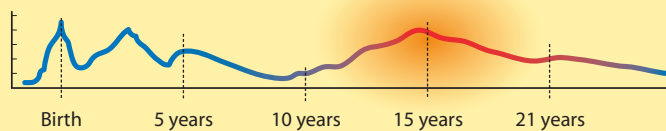
- During adolescence the brain must make key neural connections to wire itself to become a responsible, thoughtful adult.

- Alcohol, a depressant, slows down brain activity and hinders development.
- The brain's hippocampus, responsible for learning and memory, can be 10% smaller in underage drinkers

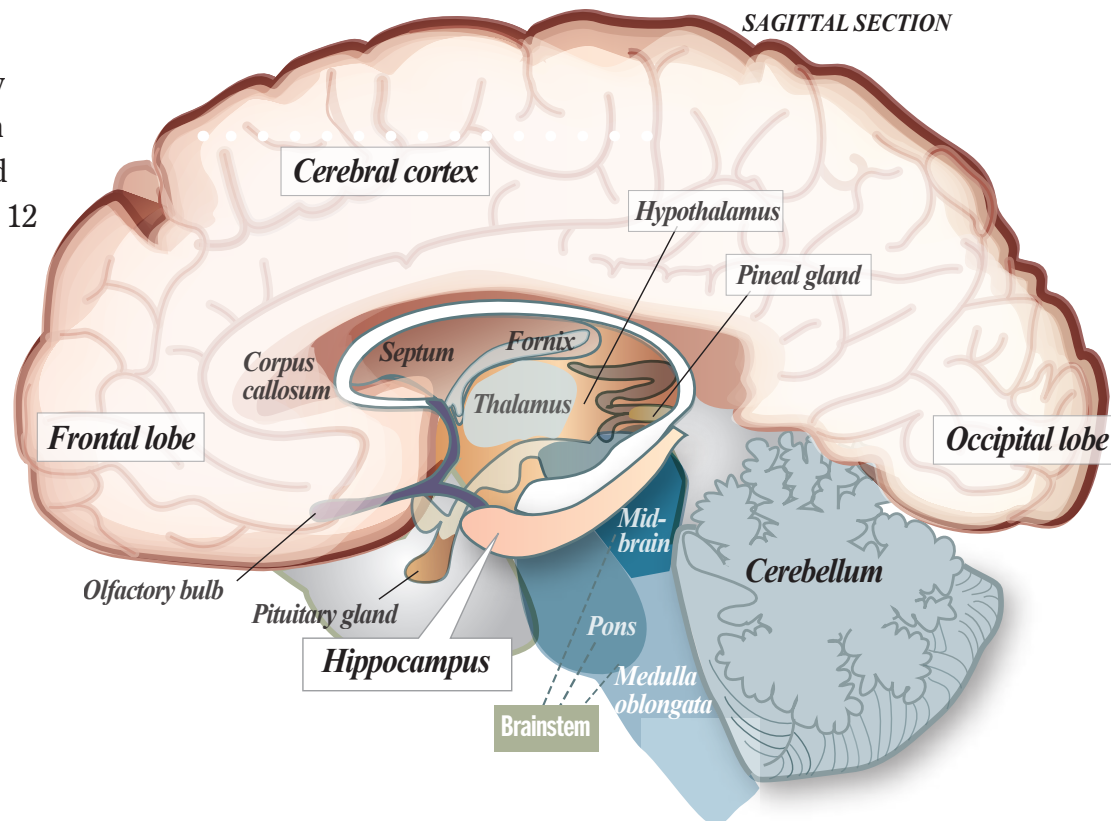
Neural plasticity refers to the ability of circuitry in the brain to physically change and grow new dendrites as a result of new learning and experiences.

### Peaks of brain growth

Drinking alcohol during times of peak growth can damage brain wiring.



**A**lcohol affects a teen brain differently than a mature adult brain. The brain goes through rapid development and “wiring” changes during the ages of 12 through the early 20s. Teen alcohol use can damage this brain wiring, which is essential to become a mature, thoughtful, responsible adult.



### Alcohol can damage three key brain areas:

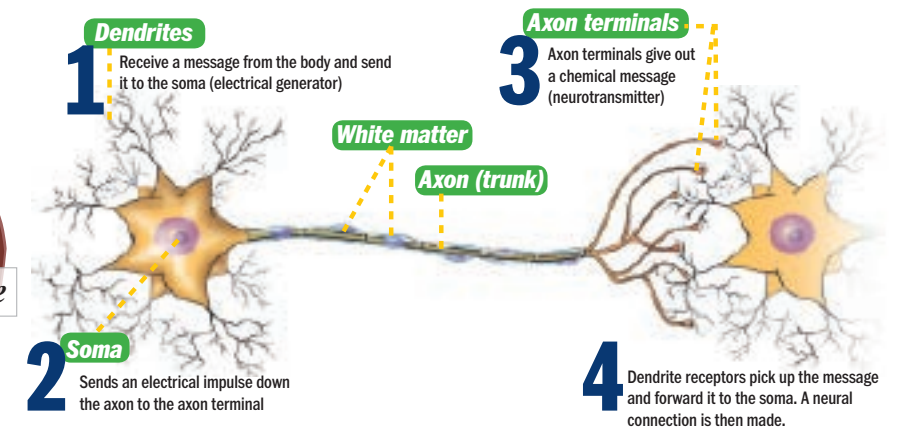
**1** “The **prefrontal** area (responsible for planning, good judgment, decision-making and impulse control) undergoes the most change during adolescence. Researchers found that adolescent drinking could cause severe changes in this area... which plays an important role in forming adult personality and behavior. Damage from alcohol at this time can be long-term and irreversible.”

**2** “The **hippocampus** (involved in learning and memory) suffers the worst alcohol-related brain damage in teens. Those who had been drinking more and for longer had significantly smaller hippocampi (10 percent). In addition, short-term or moderate drinking impairs learning and memory far more in youths than adults. Frequent drinkers may never be able to catch up in adulthood, since alcohol inhibits systems crucial for storing new information.”

American Medical Association Fact Sheet, 2003

**3** **Brain white matter damage**  
The brain is made up of gray matter (neurons) and white matter. Because alcohol suppresses brain activity, it prevents the teen brain from properly developing its essential “white matter” — the fatty-waxy coating which insulates the part of neurons that send electrical signals. Impaired white matter can negatively affect thinking and memory skills. — *Dr. Susan Tapert* (ref: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122765890>)

### How neurons communicate



Our brain is more complex than the world's most powerful computer. It is responsible for everything we think, see, hear, feel, smell or do. It even creates and directs all of our emotions. The brain is divided into different areas that direct different parts of our body. Like a complex computer, all the different parts of the brain work at the same time — like parallel processing.

It does this through more than 100 billion brain cells called neurons. A neuron looks sort of like a tree, with “branches” called dendrites, a “trunk” called an axon, and “roots” called axon terminals. The tip of each “root” contains tiny sacks of powerful chemicals called neurotransmitters. At the top of the “trunk” is a tiny electrical generator called a soma.

The brain neurons communicate by sending electrical and chemical messages from the “roots”

of one neuron to the “branches” of another. If a thought or action is repeated often, the “roots” of one neuron send more chemical, and the receiving neuron makes more “branches” to receive it. The neural connection is strengthened until it begins to look like a bushy tree instead of a spindly tree. It becomes a dominant neural pathway.

Forty percent of our neurons are “wired” at birth. They perform automatic functions such as breathing, heart and lung functions, digestion, etc. The other 60 percent are waiting to be stimulated by our learning and experiences to make connections or “wiring.” When we learn new things, new “NEURAL CONNECTIONS” are made in our brain. This is referred to as “wiring” our brain. It is like loading new software into a computer so it can do more things. The more neural connections we make, the smarter and more capable we become. Alcohol suppresses brain development.

“... it has become clear that, during adolescence... the brain is highly plastic and shaped by experience.... Alcohol appears to interfere with the changes in circuitry that occur during learning.”

—Dr. Aaron White, Duke University

## Alcohol and judgment

The teenage brain is still developing. Alcohol can impair the parts of the brain that control the following:

### Motor coordination

This includes the ability to talk, drive and process information.

### Impulse control

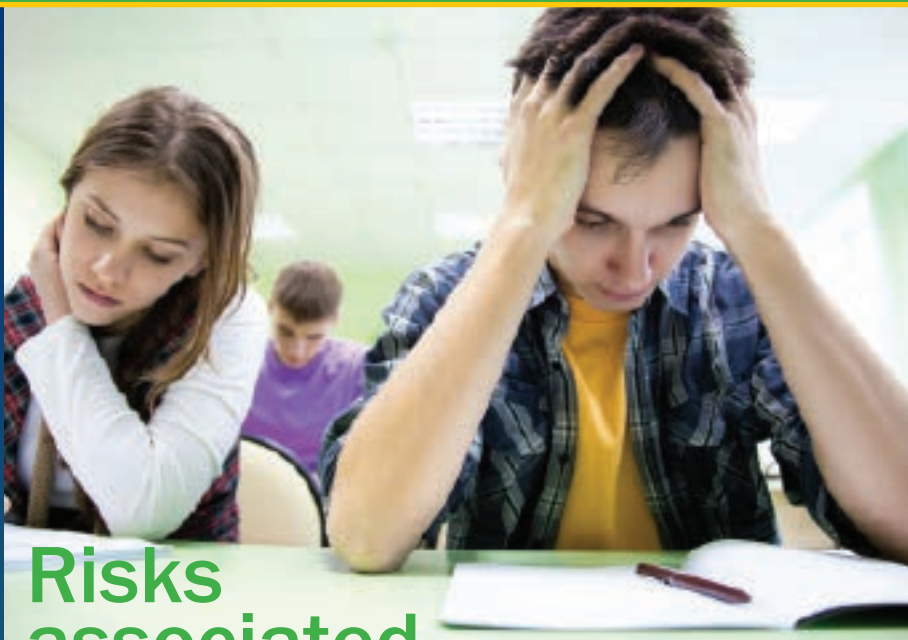
Drinking lowers inhibitions and increases the chances that a person will do something they will regret when they are sober.

### Memory

Impaired recollection and even blackouts can occur when too much alcohol has been consumed.

### Judgment and decision-making capacity

Drinking may lead young people to engage in risky behaviors including getting into a car with someone who has been drinking. These behaviors can result in illness, injury and even death.



# Risks associated with underage drinking

**A**lcohol use among children is strongly correlated with violence, poor academic performance and other harmful behaviors. Education alone will not keep your kids from using alcohol because there are constant pressures and opportunities to drink.

Further, the areas of the brain that encourage impulsivity and risk-taking develop early in a teen, while the areas that improve self-control don't develop until the very late teens or early twenties. You must stay actively involved as a parent in bonding with your teen, setting boundaries and monitoring to help your teen remain alcohol-free.

## Monitoring

Be aware that studies show kids are more at risk for drinking alcohol between the hours of **3 p.m. and 6 p.m.**, while many parents are still at work.

Find ways to check on your kids when you are not around, either with phone calls, text messaging or through a neighbor dropping by.

Visit [ParentsEmpowered.org](http://ParentsEmpowered.org) to send a text message to your kids.



## Underage Drinking Costs Everyone

### • Violence

Children who start drinking before age 15 are 12 times more likely to be injured while under the influence of alcohol and 10 times more likely to be in a fight after drinking, compared with those who wait to drink until they are 21.

### • School failure

Teens who use alcohol have higher rates of academic problems and poor performance than non-drinkers. Among eighth graders, higher truancy rates are associated with greater rates of alcohol use.

### • Promiscuity

According to a new study published in the *Journal of Alcohol and Drugs*, early sipping of alcohol by young students is associated with risky alcohol behaviors when they enter high school. In addition, offering young people just a sip of alcohol may undermine prevention messages focused toward youth.

### • Alcohol-Related Crashes

Compared with adults, young people who drink and drive have an increased risk of alcohol-related crashes because of their relative inexperience behind the wheel and their increased impairment from similar amounts of alcohol.

## ALCOHOL POISONING CAN CAUSE DEATH

Unlike adults, most kids' brains haven't yet developed the internal "cut-off" switch that makes them go to sleep or pass out from drinking too much alcohol. They can consume dangerous amounts of alcohol before they realize it's too late. This can result in alcohol poisoning which can cause difficulty breathing, unconsciousness and death. If a young person ever passes out from drinking, 911 should be called for immediate medical attention.

## UNDERAGE DRINKING COSTS EVERYONE

- There are approximately 4,300 deaths every year in the US due to underage drinking.
- The cost of underage drinking in Florida is \$3.1 billion. This is attributed to youth violence, traffic crashes and property crimes.
- Local hospitals report approximately 9,700 alcohol-related emergency department visits from July 2013 - June 2014; of these, 12-17 year olds accounted for 323 emergency department visits.





# Peers'

## influence on alcohol use

Children often think that other people their age are drinking regularly, but most are not.

- The single most
- predictive risk for
- underage drinking is
- if your child's peers
- drink. Encourage your
- kids to choose friends
- who support your family
- values and
- no-alcohol
- rules.

**S**tudents with high-refusal-assertiveness skills are less likely to drink underage. Decide on good ways to say “no” and practice them often in role-play situations. Some ideas are:

- “No thanks. Drinking is not my thing.”
- “No thanks. I need all the brain cells I've got.”
- “No thanks. I've only got one brain. Why would I want to trash it?”

If there is alcohol at a party,  
**LEAVE.**

Keep your social environment  
alcohol-free.



### The law

Possessing, purchasing or drinking alcohol before age 21 is illegal. The minimum legal drinking age of 21 has saved thousands of lives.

It is illegal for anyone to furnish or supply alcohol to a minor – punishable by up to a \$500 fine and up to 60 days in jail.





# Preventing underage drinking is as easy as 1-2-3

## Start early and stay involved.

Like many parenting skills, monitoring your children's online activities is easiest when you establish policies and expectations early. Although the tendency is for parents to become less involved as their children age, even older teens need their parents' help to stay alcohol-free.

## Parents: Increase Your Knowledge About Alcohol



View the Parent Program at <http://ecalc.ucfretrolab.org/parent/>



## 1 ► BONDING

Developing a strong relationship with your child is important.

Research shows that family conflict and a weak parent/child bond increases a child's risk of drinking underage.

Bonding can be as simple as going out and having fun together, talking about school, and making time each day to listen to your child's concerns. Studies show that even making the effort to eat dinner as a family five times each week reduces the chance that a child will use alcohol or drugs by as much as 33 percent.

## 2 ► BOUNDARIES

Parental disapproval is the number one reason why teens say they don't drink. When parents set clear rules about not using alcohol, kids usually follow them.

It's important, however, that your kids know why you don't want them to drink. Explain how underage alcohol use can change how their adolescent brains develop—impairing memory and learning capabilities while increasing their risk of addiction. Also, make sure to establish consequences for breaking the rules, and consistently enforce them.

## 3 ► MONITORING

Having friends who drink is the single greatest risk factor for underage alcohol use. As a parent, it's imperative that you know whom your child is with, where they are, and what they're doing.

Make it a habit to ask questions as your child leaves the house. Get to know his or her friends, and ensure that alcohol isn't available to them at your house or their friends' homes. Checking in with your child can be as easy as sending a text message, and if alcohol shows up at a party or event, being ready to pick your child up.

Don't forget to monitor your child's online activities, too. Today, teens spend more time interacting with each other on social media sites like Facebook than they do talking on the telephone.



## Dinner Time

**A perfect moment to talk about alcohol.**

An alarming number of pre-teens are drinking alcohol – which makes it urgent to find every opportunity to talk to your kids about the dangers of underage drinking. For tips on how and when to begin the conversation, visit:

[www.drugfreecoalition.org](http://www.drugfreecoalition.org)



## Facts for Drug Quiz



LEARN MORE

**Q. IN ORANGE COUNTY, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED DRINKING ALCOHOL IN THE PAST 30-DAYS?**

- 1) 10%    2) 24%    3) 35%    4) 49%

**Q. IN ORANGE COUNTY, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORTED DRINKING ALCOHOL IN THE PAST 30 DAYS?**

- 1) 5%    2) 8%    3) 10%    4) 16%

**Q. AMONG HIGH SCHOOL DRINKERS, WHAT WAS THE HIGHEST RATED DRINKING LOCATION IN THE PAST 30 DAYS?**

- 1) Another Person's Home    2) My Home  
3) Restaurant, Bar or Club    4) Car

**Q. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THINK IT IS WRONG TO DRINK ALCOHOL ON A REGULAR BASIS?**

- 1) 50%    2) 63%    3) 76%    4) 80%



### CREDITS

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Answer: 1) 24%    Answer: 2) 8%    Answer: 3) Another Person's Home    Answer: 4) 76%

# ***PARENT Involvement It Works!***

Raising Healthy **DRUG FREE** Youth  
[www.drugfreecoalition.org](http://www.drugfreecoalition.org)

