

UNDERAGE DRINKING

Underage drinking is a serious public health problem in the United States. Alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth, and drinking by young people poses enormous health and safety risks.

The consequences of underage drinking can affect everyone. We all feel the effects of the aggressive behavior, property damage, injuries, violence, and deaths that can result from underage drinking. This is not simply a problem for some families—it is a nationwide concern.



Underage drinking poses a range of risks and negative consequences. It is dangerous because it:

- **Causes many deaths & injuries**
Serious injury and deaths due to alcohol include: vehicle crashes, homicides, alcohol poisoning, falls, burns, drowning, and suicides.
- **Impairs judgment**
Drinking can lead to poor decisions about engaging in risky behavior, including drinking and driving, sexual activity (such as unprotected sex), and aggressive or violent behavior.
- **Trouble with the Law**
Drinking may cause youth to have trouble in school or with the law. Drinking alcohol also is associated with the use of other drugs.
- **Increase risk for substance use disorders**
Research shows that people who start drinking before the age of 15 are 4 times more likely to meet the criteria for alcohol dependence at some point in their lives.
- **Interferes with brain development**
Research shows that young people's brains keep developing well into their 20s. Alcohol can alter this development, potentially affecting both brain structure and function. This may cause cognitive or learning problems. This is especially a risk when people start drinking young and drink heavily.

The Role Parents Play

Parents and teachers can play a big role in shaping young people's attitudes toward drinking. Parents in particular can have either a positive or negative influence.

Parents can help by:

- Talking about the dangers of drinking
- Drinking responsibly, if they choose to drink
- Serving as positive role models in general
- Not making alcohol available
- Getting to know their children's friends
- Having regular conversations about life in general
- Connecting with other parents about sending clear messages about the importance of not drinking alcohol
- Supervising all parties to make sure there is no alcohol
- Encouraging kids to participate in healthy and fun activities that do not involve alcohol

Research shows that children whose parents are actively involved in their lives are less likely to drink alcohol.

On the other hand, research shows that a child with a parent who binge drinks is much more likely to binge drink than a child whose parents do not binge drink.



83% of youth report parents are the **leading influence** in their **decision to not drink alcohol.**
(The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility)

Youth who start drinking before age 15 are **5X more likely** to develop alcohol dependence or abuse later in life than those who begin drinking at or after age 21. (CDC)



Warning Signs of Underage Drinking

Adolescence is a time of change and growth, including behavior changes. These changes usually are a normal part of growing up but sometimes can point to an alcohol problem. Parents and teachers should pay close attention to the following warning signs that may indicate underage drinking:

- Changes in mood, including anger and irritability
- Academic and/or behavioral problems in school
- Rebelliousness
- Changing groups of friends
- Low energy level
- Less interest in activities and/or care in appearance
- Finding alcohol among a young person's things
- Smelling alcohol on a young person's breath
- Problems concentrating and/or remembering
- Slurred speech
- Coordination problems



Treating Underage Drinking Problems

Screening young people for alcohol use and alcohol use disorder is very important and may avoid problems down the road. Screening by a health practitioner (e.g., pediatrician) provides an opportunity to identify problems early and address them before they escalate. It also allows young people to ask questions of a knowledgeable adult. NIAAA and the American Academy of Pediatrics both recommend that all youth be regularly screened for alcohol use.

Some young people can experience serious problems as a result of drinking, including alcohol use disorder, which require intervention by trained professionals. Professional treatment options include:

- Seeing a counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or other trained professional
- Participating in outpatient or inpatient treatment at a substance abuse treatment facility or other licensed program

If you have questions or concerns about a loved one contact Addiction Helpline at Townhall II: 330.678.3006