



Straight Talk About Underage Drinking

Now that you're older, the choices are rarely so simple as they used to be. And even though you're not yet an adult, you're expected to make adult-like decisions.

With prom, graduation, and other end-of-school celebrations at hand, there's yet another crucial decision you must make - to drink or not to drink. We believe that talking openly with you about underage drinking – its causes, its effects, and its consequences – may help you choose **not** to drink until you're the legal age of 21.

Why do young people drink?

Regardless of the fact that it's illegal to drink before the age of 21, many teenagers do. And they do so for a variety of reasons.

Some young people drink because their friends drink or they have the mistaken idea that if they drink they will fit in with their peers. Others drink because they think it makes them more fun to be around or makes them more popular. Still others drink under the false notion that they can escape their problems or relieve feelings of fear, loneliness, and self-doubt.

There are no good reasons for a young person to drink. Instead of solving problems and helping you feel better about yourself, drinking can make things worse.

What are the consequences of drinking before you are 21?

At the very least, the inability to make responsible choices about drinking can cause you to make a fool of yourself in front of the people you so desperately want to impress – your friends. Underage drinking is also associated with family problems, bad grades, poor performance in athletics, truancy, and fights. As if that isn't bad enough, if you are caught with any TRACE of alcohol in your system while driving, you will automatically lose your driving privileges – no questions asked.



What happens when you drink?

Alcohol is considered a depressant. Almost as soon as it is used, alcohol enters the bloodstream and affects the brain. It slows your heart rate, lowers your blood pressure and respiration rate, and decreases reflex responses.

Alcohol remains in the bloodstream until the liver has time to break it down. Since it takes an hour for the liver to break down an ounce of alcohol, a person feels the effects for a long time.

Source: National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

Making Good Decisions

Decision making is an important skill to learn because you are faced with an overwhelming array of decisions every day – some routine, some big, some little. The more you know about how to make a good decision, the better off you will be.

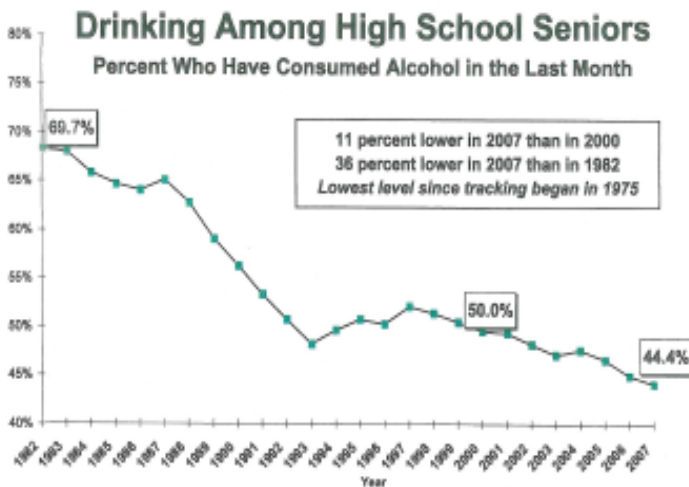
So, what exactly is a “good” decision?

According to Carolyn Wesson, author of *Teen Troubles...How To Keep Them From Becoming Tragedies*, a good, or right, decision is one that:

- fulfills your needs or wants, not someone else's. Remember, only you know what is best for you.
- won't harm anyone. It's important that the solution to the problem does not create a problem, or harm someone else.
- is honest and fair.
- is realistic and based on facts. Don't base any decisions on hope, assumptions, or wishful thinking.



This publication is provided by your local beer distributor and the Associated Beer Distributors of Illinois.



Source: The University of Michigan Monitoring the Future Study, sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Surveys of nationally representative samples of American high school seniors were begun in 1975, making the class of 2007 the 33rd such class surveyed. Surveys of 10th and 12th graders were added to the design in 1991, making the 2007 nationally representative sample the 11th such class surveyed. The sample sizes in 2007 are 36,099 eighth graders in 1,017 schools, 14,798 tenth graders in 1,017 schools, and 15,111 twelfth graders in 1,017 schools, for a total of 66,015 students in 600 secondary schools. The sample sizes are generally a mark of the representativeness of students in that grade in public and private secondary schools across the United States. Schools are selected with probability proportional to their enrollment size. See the findings brief at <http://www.umich.edu/mfu>. Updated 12/13/2007.



The ABCs of the BAC

To determine if someone is driving under the influence of alcohol, a law enforcement officer may measure that person's BAC – blood alcohol concentration. BAC is determined by how much a person drinks and his or her body weight.

In the state of Illinois, a 21 year-old adult is considered under the influence of alcohol if he or she has a BAC of .08. There is “zero tolerance” for anyone under the age of 21. A BAC of .01 is enough to lose your driving privileges for years and if you're caught with a BAC of .08, you will be charged with driving under the influence. A “DUI” conviction can get you arrested, face possible jail time, heavy fines, criminal penalties, and revocation of your driver's license and vehicle registration.

Illinois Secretary of State

How Do I Tell If My Friend Has a Drinking Problem?

Although it's not always easy to tell if a friend has a drinking problem, there are warning signs. They include:

- Gets drunk on a regular basis
- Lies frequently, including about how much alcohol he or she drinks
- Avoids you in order to get drunk
- Gives up activities he or she used to participate in
- Does poorly in school
- Believes he or she needs to drink to have fun
- Has frequent hangovers
- Pressures others to drink
- Takes more risks, including sexual risks
- Has blackouts – forgets what he or she did while drinking
- Feels rundown, hopeless, depressed
- Sounds selfish and uncaring about others
- Talks frequently about drinking
- Gets into trouble
- Drinks heavily and drives

Because it's difficult for most people to admit that they have a drinking problem, it's often up to others to try and help them. You can't force a friend to get help, but you can encourage and support them. The first step in that process is getting your friend to admit he or she has a problem and needs help.

If you decide to talk to a friend, make sure the timing is right and be prepared for denial and even anger. Never accuse your friend of having a drinking problem but express your concerns. Talk about your feelings. Be caring and understanding, and offer to go with your friend to get help.

–Adapted from the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information



Debunking the Myths

It's not easy being you. There's a lot of mixed messages out there. It's not easy to differentiate between what's true and what's not. But if you arm yourself with a little knowledge, you'll know what to say and do next time you're confronted with a choice about drinking.

Myth No. 1 – Drinking will make you popular.

Is that so? Young people who drink are prone to having bad breath, bloating and puffiness, and zits, not to mention a lack of control over the way they act. Does that fit your idea of popularity? Didn't think so.

Myth No. 2 – Alcohol gives you more energy.

Alcohol is a depressant. That means it slows everything down, including your energy level.

Myth No. 3 – Everybody reacts the same to alcohol.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Many factors determine how you will react to alcohol – body weight, time of day, how you feel about yourself, body chemistry. The truth is, no two people will be affected the same way when they drink.

Myth No. 4 – A cold shower or a cup of coffee will sober someone up.

Nothing...we repeat...nothing sobers a person up except time. Go ahead and have a cup of coffee or take a cold shower, if you want to be a wide-awake drunk!

Myth No. 5 – It's none of your business if a friend drinks.

It is your business, if you're a real friend.

Myth No. 6 – People who drink too much only hurt themselves.

Every problem drinker affects at least four other people – mothers, fathers, siblings, best friends, boyfriends or girlfriends. And that doesn't count those who drink and drive. They put everyone in danger.

Source: Mothers Against Drunk Driving

Alcohol affects your driving by:



- **Slowing your reflexes**
- **Losing concentration**
- **Losing coordination**
- **Blurring your vision**
- **Causing poor judgment**