



Underage Drinking and the Back-to-School Transition

Your health is important.

Because the Youens and Duchicela Clinic believes this, the following is brought to you in an effort to provide wellness information that you can use to help manage and maintain your health.

This week, the focus is on underage drinking during the back-to-school transition.

Underage drinking is illegal consumption of alcohol by an individual under the age of 21. For some teenagers, drinking may be a way to defy authority, fit in with older peers, or simply combat boredom.

When teenagers return to school after summer break, they may be apt to not only experiment with new ideas, but they may also find themselves under the influence of peer pressure. As some parents may return to full-time work when their kids head back to school and others simply settle into a routine, risky behaviors from teenagers may be difficult to watch.

Nonetheless, it is the responsibility of parents to ensure the safety of their children. It is also up to parents to communicate with their children, as they are the most influential voice their children have.

Underage drinking may be a topic parents want to ignore with their children, but it should not be. A 2006 study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found that an estimated 53.9 percent of underage persons (20.6 million persons) had used alcohol in their lifetime. Surprisingly, a subsequent study found that one out of every two eighth graders has tried alcohol.



Alcohol use by underage individuals can occur both inside and outside of the home; in fact, SAMHSA studies note that two out of three teens age 13-18 say it is easy to get alcohol from their own homes without their parents knowing about it.

Underage drinking has serious consequences, as teenagers' brains are still developing. Drinking can impair judgment, memory, coordination, and impulse control. Additionally, alcohol use among youth has a strong correlation with violence, risky sexual behavior, poor academic performance, future illicit drug use, and overall weak decision making.

To help curb your teenager's desire for experimentation with alcohol, it is important to let your child know where you stand on the issue. According to Charles Curie, SAMHSA Administrator, "What parents may not realize is that children say that parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink." In other words, a parent's openness with his/her child about the dangers of underage drinking and specifically voicing disapproval of bad choices goes a long way in ultimately influencing their behavior.

This article may be a good springboard in a conversation with your teen about alcohol. If you need additional help in dealing with underage drinking—or another alcohol-related issue—SAMHSA's National Drug Information Treatment and Referral Hotline is available 24 hours a day at 1-800-622-HELP

The information provided here is not to be used as a substitute for medical attention. Remember that, should you have specific medical questions or desire more information, contact your doctor.