

Youth Alcohol Initiative

Is underage drinking a problem?

In 2002 8.8% of alcohol related crashes involved a driver 15-20 years old that was drinking.

How big is the problem?

In 2002 there were over 34,000 teens, ages 12-19, admitted to alcohol addiction programs. It is estimated that this represents less than half of the teens in the State with an alcohol abuse problem. Children as young as 10 years old were admitted for alcohol addiction.

How do kids get alcohol?

By 10th grade, nearly 90% of youth have tried alcohol. Six out of ten high school seniors are regular (at least monthly) users of alcohol. Almost two thirds of those that drink, simply walk into retail stores and buy it without being ask for ID's. Others use fake ID's or ask friends or older siblings to make the purchase for them. A popular and frequent source of alcohol for teens is the family refrigerator or liquor cabinet.

Are young users of alcohol more like to use other drugs or become addicts?

Statistics show that most users of other drugs, almost 90%, first used alcohol and, they continue using alcohol with regular use of other drugs. As a result these young people have higher-than-average rates of alcohol-related injury and death. In a recent survey of adults in addiction programs, 82% said they were using alcohol by age 15.

What kind of alcoholic beverages do young people drink?

Beer and wine coolers is the beverage preferred by most young people. Wine coolers for their fruity, non-alcoholic taste, because they think wine coolers don't contain much alcohol and it is not as easily detected on their breath. Beer however, is by far the leading alcoholic beverage for teens. In 1996 Jr. and Sr. high school students drank over 1.2 billion cans of beer. Beer was the alcoholic beverage consumed by over 76% of drivers in car crashes in 1996.

Why do kids drink?

The reasons teens drink are as many and as varied as there are colors, but many of the reasons come from the home. They see parents drinking to cope, relax or to "have a good time." They drink because they think it helps them escape, they want to fit in or as an act of rebellion. They drink because they want to know what the "forbidden fruit" taste like. They drink because they are bombarded daily by the industry that says drinking is cool and will make you a man or a woman. Watch the advertisements for beer and see how many target the teenage market.

What is being done?

Local, County and State enforcement agencies spend millions of dollars each year monitoring and attempting to control retail purchases. Alcohol has been included in drug education in our schools and teachers are being trained to identify students with potential drug problems. As a member of the media your support is essential to help change public perception of this problem and to help educate parents. Teens that drink are not necessarily "Bad kids", they are victims.

What can I do in my community?

One of the first things you can do is to create a healthy and informed environment for your

children:

1. Talk to your children and be prepared to listen.
 - Remember that the problems our children deal with are not the same as the problems we had as teens.
2. Next, get involved.
 - Be prepared to report retailers you see selling to teens.
 - Be prepared to tell friends and neighbors if you see their children drinking.
 - Call the police if there is a party at a neighbor's house, and they are out of town, if you suspect alcohol is being served.
 - Support intervention and prevention programs in your community.
3. Take time to learn the early warning signs that your son or daughter may be using alcohol or other drugs.

Resources:

Resource Center on Substance Abuse

National High School Senior Survey

National Institute on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Florida Family and Children Services