

PREVENTING UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE: HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Alcohol use by underage youth is a public health issue in New Hampshire.¹ It is one of the most commonly used substances among youth. Young people use alcohol for many of the same reasons adults do. In the short-term, they want to feel good or feel better. It has the powerful effect of reducing anxiety, fear and other negative feelings, but it also results in increased anxiety, depression and shame. Because alcohol is such a commonly used substance, many people believe when youth drink, it is a normal rite of passage for them. However, research suggests that these favorable or casual attitudes about youth alcohol use coupled with other factors can actually put a young person at risk of developing a substance use disorder later in life.

It's important for parents and other caregivers to be informed and involved when it comes to preventing underage drinking.² Working together we can help youth understand the harms and consequences associated with underage drinking and encourage the protective factors to enhance connectedness to family, community and school.

GET THE FACTS ABOUT UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE

Alcohol and the Adolescent Brain Don't Mix.

Teenagers are hardwired to take risks. They seek novelty and excitement, but are not well equipped to consider the consequences, which makes them especially vulnerable when it comes to substance use.

Research indicates that alcohol use during the teenage years can interfere with normal adolescent brain development and increase the risk of developing an alcohol use disorder later in life. The brains and bodies of youth are developing through age 25; building important neural circuits that impact memory, mood and motivation.³ Early substance use can impact the development of the prefrontal cortex which is the part of the brain responsible for decision making and impulse control. Because the adolescent brain is under major development, it is important to delay use.⁴

It is important to prevent early-stage use or delay use for young people, because initiation early in life leads to a greater risk of addiction later in life. People who use alcohol before age 15 are six times more likely to become alcohol dependent than adults who begin drinking at age 21.⁵

Binge Drinking is Excessive Drinking

Young people tend to drink less often than adults, but when they do drink, they frequently drink more compared to the average adult. That's because young people consume more than 90% of their alcohol by binge drinking.⁶ Binge drinking is defined as having four (4) standard drinks for women, or five (5) for men, in about two hours. Binge drinking results in a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) reaching up to .08 (80mg%). Other factors such as weight, hormones, emotional state and the amount of food you have eaten can influence how quickly your body absorbs the alcohol. Binge drinking is dangerous, because too much alcohol in the bloodstream impacts the central nervous system, which controls basic life functions such as breathing, heart rate and temperature. Drinking an excessive amount of alcohol can result in alcohol poisoning, loss of consciousness and even death.⁷

YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE - YOU ARE PREVENTION

When caring adults take an interest in young people, they can buffer some of the factors that put youth at risk of misusing alcohol. There are concrete things we all can do to help young people make healthy and safe decisions around alcohol use. Start by talking to the young people in your life about the serious physical and emotional harms of alcohol use. Share your expectations of no alcohol use. Also provide solid supervision of young people, and monitor where they are and who they are with. Make time for positive activities like meals, cooking, going for a walk or watching a show. This builds a strong sense of belonging and connectedness to community, family and school. Help build skills around handling emotions, especially a tolerance to cope with strong negative feelings. Practice setting limits and managing stress in your own life, so youth see you cope with



healthy strategies. Lastly, it is important to teach refusal skills. Young people need to feel they have the skills and ability to say “no” when they are offered alcohol or other substances.

Tips on monitoring and supervision:

- Supervise social gatherings in your home to ensure there is no underage drinking. Make sure your teens know the rules ahead of time.
- Be aware of New Hampshire’s laws around underage drinking and access to alcohol. Underage drinking is not allowed even in your own home. Under this law, a person who hosts a party where minors drink alcohol or use drugs may be charged with a misdemeanor, fined up to \$2,000 and/or spend a year in jail.
- When your child is going over to a friend’s house, plan ahead by contacting their friends’ parents to determine their house rules, level of supervision and their thoughts on youth drinking.

CLEAR BOUNDARIES RESULT IN HEALTHY BEHAVIOR

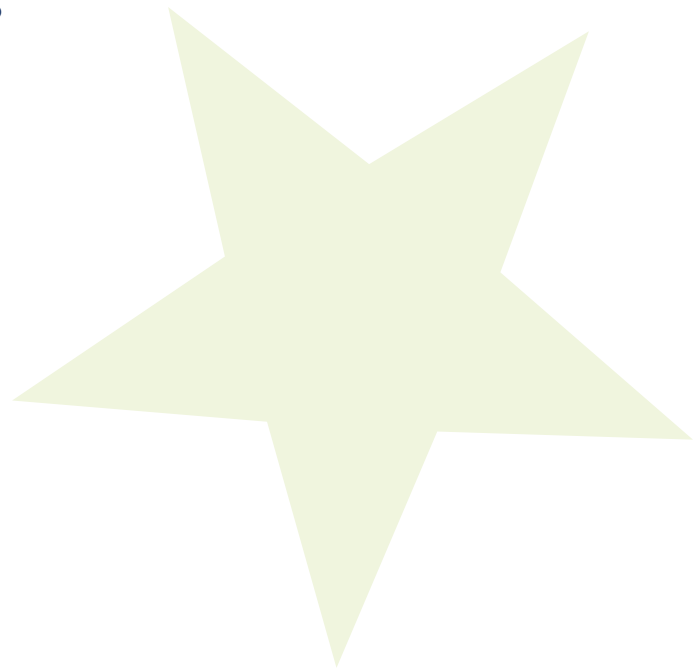
Although it may not seem like it, when parents talk about underage drinking and substance use, their children hear them. Most young people report that the reason they don’t drink or use other drugs is because they don’t want to disappoint their parents. When you set clear

expectations for healthy behavior, you send a message to your child that they matter. Remember parents are the #1 influence in the choices their children make.⁸

Numerous studies show that children of parents who are more lenient or permissive about youth drinking — allowing their children to drink on occasion, not monitoring the alcohol in the home or modeling alcohol use as a means of relaxing or having fun — are more likely to drink and to do so heavily than children of more restrictive and cautious parents.

SEEK EXPERT HELP IF NEEDED

We all want to do what we can to protect our children, and we worry about what alcohol may do to their health and well-being. It can be difficult to assess when your child is struggling with their drinking, because they may try to hide their behavior out of guilt, shame or denial. Seek the services and support of a professional when you think your child is misusing alcohol. Your child’s doctor can help with treatment, counseling and medication (if needed).



- 1 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2018). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS) Publication No. SMA 18-5068, NSDUH Series H-53). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- 2 https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Alcohol-Guide_Families_030821.pdf
- 3 <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-adolescent-substance-use-disorder-treatment-research-based-guide/principles-adolescent-substance-use-disorder-treatment>
- 4 Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality.(2017). 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed tables. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse andMental Health Services Administration.
- 5 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings, Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; 2014.
- 6 <https://www.smartrecovery.org/binge-drinking-vs-heavy-drinking/?highlight=binge%20drinking>
- 7 <https://bingefree603.org/know-your-limits/>
- 8 <https://drugfreenh.org/for-families/>

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Caregivers can find New Hampshire resources, learn how to talk with their child, and access helpful information to address early alcohol and drug use through:

Talk. They Hear You Campaign

<https://www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you>: aims to reduce underage drinking and substance use among youth under the age of 21 by providing parents and caregivers with information and resources they need to address alcohol and other drug use with their children early.

Partnership to End Addiction

<https://drugfree.org/prevention-and-taking-action-early/>: Science and research-based information to help parents protect their child's well-being and recognize substance use early in their children.

Binge Free 603

<https://bingefree603.org/>: What's Your Reason: Health campaign where young adults in NH share their reasons for not overdoing it with alcohol. What's your reason?

Rethinking Drinking

<https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/how-much-is-too-much/>: Curious if you drink too much? Want to learn about the safe limits of alcohol use and recognize when it is a problem? Find tips and strategies for making a change with your drinking and ways to reduce your risks.



Extension



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