



ALCOHOL

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Alcohol remains the number one drug of choice used by adolescents and teens. Underage drinking is a leading public health problem and more likely to kill young people than all illegal drugs combined.

Data from the MiPHY/Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth survey 2010 provides a local picture about use, attitudes and perspectives of Calhoun County teens.

Almost 10% of 7th graders had their first drink prior to age 11; the average age of first use by 9th and 11th graders was 13.

The average age at their first time drunk: 11.4 years of age among 7th graders and 13.9 among 9th and 11th graders.

59% of 9th graders state alcohol is easy to obtain.

THE RISKS:

- **Binge Drinking:** Teens who do drink alcohol tend to binge drink (consume 5+ drinks on a single occasion). This high risk drinking can be dangerous and lead to addiction problems at an early age.
- **Alcohol Related Traffic Crash Deaths:** A major cause of death from injuries involving motor vehicle crashes, especially amongst novice young drivers, is underage alcohol use.
- **Assault:** Alcohol use increases the risk of being a victim or perpetrator of physical or sexual assault.
- **Poor Sports Performance:** Research done by John Underwood, designer of the Life of an Athlete Program (New York), found that *one night* of binge drinking can negate *two weeks* of athletic practice.
- **Addiction:** Youth who have alcohol addicted parents are four times more likely to have addiction problems themselves.

ALCOHOL and THE BRAIN

Brain research over the past decade has boosted our understanding of how alcohol impacts adolescent brain development. When ingested, alcohol has its initial effects on the frontal area of the brain, the cerebral cortex. This region is our thinking center responsible for planning, judgment of risk, making decisions and problem solving. With teen tendencies to binge drink, impairments to the cerebral cortex impact teen behavior. When impulse control is weakened, teen participation in high risk behaviors rises – behaviors such as initial inexperienced driving, sexual involvement, vandalism, aggression with a higher likelihood toward violence and peer pressure to engage in illegal activity.

The brain continues to develop into one's mid-20's. The parts of the brain most negatively affected by alcohol are the Hippocampus (site for learning and memory formation) and Frontal Lobes (site from which we plan, decide, control impulses). Research now shows the hippocampus of a drinker has a tendency to be smaller than that of a non-drinker.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEEN:

- Talk to your children about alcohol because if they are not talking to you, they may be getting inaccurate information from peers or other adults
- Set clear expectations for your teens about no drinking and follow through with consequences imposed. Research shows that most teens still find parental influence and approval being critical in their lives.
- Teach youth about real risks and dangers of underage drinking
- Discuss laws and consequences as they apply to underage drinking. Minors caught transporting alcohol or with alcohol in their body can be arrested for MIP/Minor in Possession and face fines, a record and possible loss of their drivers license. Parents caught providing alcohol or providing a place for teens to drink can face fines and possible jail time.
- Keep alcohol locked up or out of the house. The primary place youth get their beer is next to the milk! “Garage surfing” (getting from the refrigerator or stash in your garage) may be more common than you think.
- Discuss issues with your neighbors, friends and relatives so you can all be on the same page in what you say, how you role model and what you do about underage drinking behaviors and consequences.