National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

Parents—Talk With Your High School Grads About Celebrating Safely

Graduation

Graduation is a time to celebrate. But before your high school seniors begin their parties, take the time to talk with them about keeping events alcohol-free—it just may save a life.

No amount of underage drinking is legal or safe. And we know that any underage drinking can lead to consuming too much alcohol, which may result in poor decisions, injuries, alcohol overdose, and possibly death.

It's About Your Teen

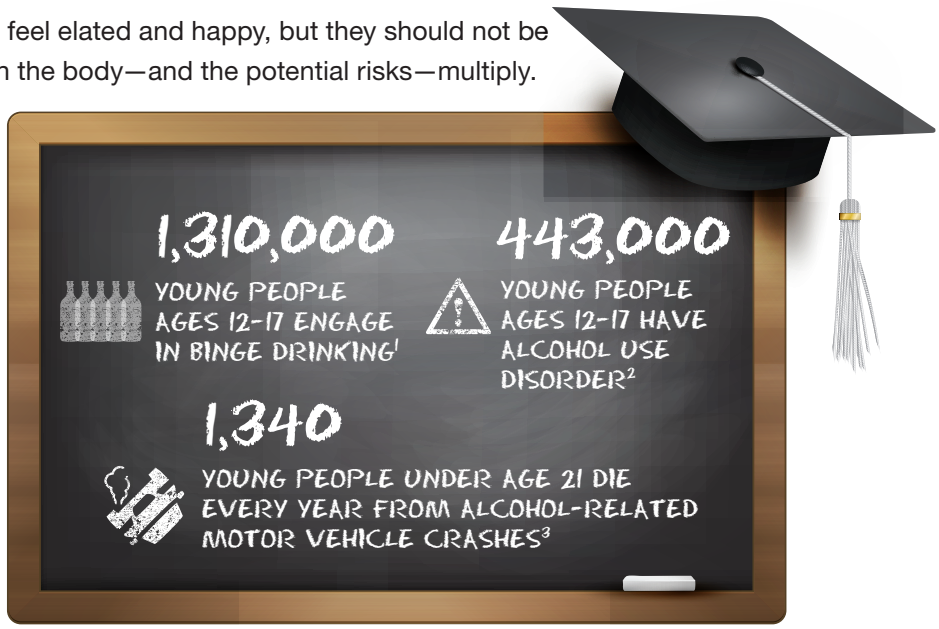
A teenager's brain is still developing, and it is very sensitive to alcohol's effects on judgment and decision-making. Tragedies can—and do—happen, so underage drinking should not be a part of any end-of-year celebration.

The Effects of Alcohol Can Be Deceptive

If you are asked to explain the reasons behind your rules, you can describe the effects of alcohol on the human body.

When people drink alcohol, they may temporarily feel elated and happy, but they should not be fooled. As blood alcohol level rises, the effects on the body—and the potential risks—multiply.

- Inhibitions and memory become affected, so people may say and do things that they will regret later and possibly not remember doing at all.
- Decision-making skills are affected, so people may be at greater risk for driving under the influence—and risking an alcohol-related traffic crash—or making unwise decisions about sex.
- Aggression can increase, potentially leading to everything from verbal abuse to physical fights.
- Coordination and physical control are also impacted. When drinking leads to loss of balance, slurred speech, and blurred vision, even normal activities can become more dangerous.



[1] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Table 2.20A—Alcohol Use, Binge Alcohol Use, and Heavy Alcohol Use in Past Month Among Persons Aged 12 or Older, by Detailed Age Category: Numbers in Thousands, 2016 and 2017. https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHDetailedTabs2017/NSDUHDetailedTabs2017.htm#tab2-20A. Accessed April 12, 2019.

[2] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Table 5.5A—Alcohol Use Disorder in Past Year Among Persons Aged 12 or Older, by Age Group and Demographic Characteristics: Numbers in Thousands, 2016 and 2017. https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHDetailedTabs2017/NSDUHDetailedTabs2017.htm#tab5-5A. Accessed April 12, 2019.

[3] National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Fatality Analysis Reporting System. https://www.nhtsa.gov/FARS. Accessed April 12, 2019.

» Consuming a dangerously high amount of alcohol can also lead to alcohol overdose and death. When people drink too much, they may eventually pass out (lose consciousness). Reflexes like gagging and breathing can be suppressed. That means people who have had too much alcohol could vomit and choke, or just stop breathing completely. Vulnerability to overdose increases if the teen is already on a sedative-hypnotic (such as Valium, Xanax, or Benadryl) or pain medication.

Think About It!

Drinking to celebrate graduation can result in vandalism, arrests, sexual assaults, injuries and trips to the emergency room, alcohol-related traffic crashes, and worse. Drinking by teens can put them—and their friends—in real danger. Ask them to consider this question: Is that any way to celebrate?

Talk With Your Graduate

It is critical to talk with your graduate because research shows that parents do make a difference. By serving as a positive role model, talking with other parents and your teens, supervising parties to make sure no alcohol is served, and supporting alcohol-free school celebrations, you can help prevent a life-changing mistake.

Remember. . .

Tell your graduate to play it safe and party right—and alcohol-free—at graduation. Because a well-deserved celebration shouldn't end in tragedy.

A Word About Alcohol Overdose

Thousands of students are transported to the emergency department each year for alcohol overdose, which occurs when high levels of alcohol suppress the nervous and respiratory systems. Signs of this dangerous condition can include:

» Slow or irregular breathing;

» Vomiting;

» Mental confusion, stupor, loss of consciousness, or coma; and

» Hypothermia or low body temperature, bluish or pale skin.

An alcohol overdose can lead to permanent brain damage or death, so a person showing any of these signs requires immediate medical attention. If you or your graduate notices any of these signs, don't wait. Call 911 if you suspect an alcohol overdose.

For more information, please visit: https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov

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