



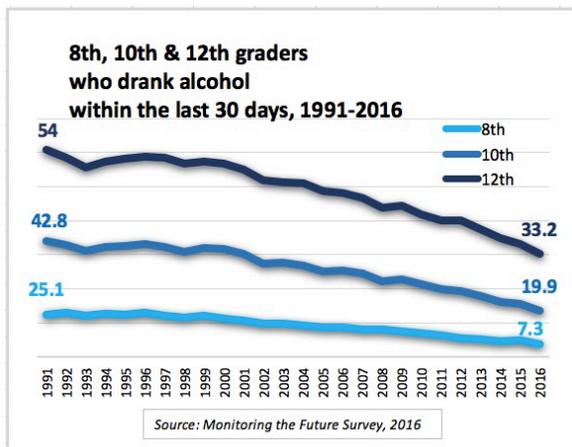
April 2017 Newsletter

Alcohol Awareness Month...and kids

April is Alcohol Awareness Month and it's a good time to look at how we, as adults, are interacting with alcohol around young people.

Drinking rates among youth are the lowest they've been in years which is reason to celebrate. In 2016 the Monitoring the Future Survey found that 7% of 8th graders, 20% of 10th graders and 33% of 12th graders had consumed alcohol in the past 30 days; down from 1991 rates of 25%, 43% and 54% respectively.

But while kids are drinking less, we're learning more about the potential harm that alcohol poses to the not-inconsequential number that do drink.



Brain science

As medical technology advances, we're learning more about the impact of alcohol on the adolescent brain. The human brain develops from the back to front, with the prefrontal cortex being among the last areas to become fully developed in the mid-20's. This area is the center of judgment and impulse control, and adding alcohol to the

mix can impede development. The memory center of the brain, the hippocampus, has been found to be smaller in teens that drink a lot. In her studies of the adolescent brain, Susan Tapert of the University of California San Diego has found that just 12 drinks a month—two or three binges—can result in diminished memory and thinking skills in teens.

The European model debunked

In an effort to keep kids from drinking irresponsibly as adults, some parents look to the “European model” of allowing young children to drink at home where they are supervised, so that they won't drink so much in other places. But the data says this tends to backfire. Kids whose parents allow drinking at home tend to drink more overall, and they find ways to get alcohol outside of the home.

Australian researchers surveyed parents and children over the course of four years and found that children who were allowed to drink at home at 13 or 14 were three times more likely to be drinking more at age 16 than their peers who were not served alcohol at home.

Modeling moderation

It may be more effective for parents to model moderation practices when it comes to alcohol. Home consumption and hosting can be opportunities to show children how adults can drink and be safe. Part of the effort could involve maintaining open lines of communication so kids know that some activities are for adults only and why that is the case. Parents should realize that if they rely heavily on alcohol to cope with the

stress of parenting, this is a lesson that is being passed on, too.

Talking about it

Keeping the lines of communication open, making time to talk, and researching credible sources when you don't know the answers are all steps in the right direction. There are many good resources for talking to kids of different ages including Partnership for Drug-Free Kids (drugfree.org) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (samhsa.gov/underage drinking) and Mothers Against Drunk Driving's Power of Parents (<http://www.madd.org/underage-drinking/the-power-of-parents/>). These sources also have tools for helping kids develop refusal skills around alcohol and other unsafe activities.

It's also important for kids to know about whether Medical Amnesty laws apply where they live. Such a law would apply in a situation where someone is passed out possibly due to alcohol poisoning. If an underage person needs medical assistance, Medical Amnesty means that the person calling for help will not get in trouble. There is great potential for these kinds of laws to save lives.

These conversations may be uncomfortable, but if they don't learn about alcohol from caring adults, they may get inaccurate information from someone else.

Healthy risk-taking

It's developmentally appropriate, even essential, for teens to take risks to help them find their way in the world. Adults need to encourage healthy risk taking—the kind of behaviors that challenge and build skills and resilience, but don't put them at risk for great physical harm.

And even if you don't have teenagers or young children at home, we can all do something to discourage underage drinking. If you shop somewhere that aggressively sells cheap alcohol, fill out a comment card or talk to the manager and ask them to consider changing their sales practices.

Tough ID laws and good training for servers and sellers can be impediments for kids to get their hands on booze.

Supporting opportunities in your community for kids to get involved in sports, arts and other activities that don't revolve around drinking can go a long way to making sure that the investment in schools, etc. and the kids that attend them, are not lost.

Also enforcing alcohol laws that keep the alcohol industry regulated is a basic but often overlooked need for keeping trends moving in the right direction. Only responsible regulated industry members should be involved in the alcohol business.

Sources:

www.monitoringthefuture.org

<https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh284/205-212.htm>

drugfree.org

<https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/news/parents-may-be-putting-their-children-path-drinking>

ncadd.org/family-friends/there-is-help/talking-with-children

<http://www.medicalamnesty.org/>

madd.org