



March 2017 Newsletter

Advocating for safe socializing

There has been great news on the underage drinking front. Young people are not so interested in getting drunk. In both the US and the UK, underage drinking is down, and young adults are drinking at lower rates than past generations.

According to the UK Office for National Statistics, a quarter of 16-24 year-olds are tee-totalers. Getting wasted doesn't seem as fun to them as it did to young adults in the past. Whether for financial, health, or other reasons, young people are finding other ways to spend their time and money.

But it would be a shame if drinking less also meant socializing less. Social media can't create community in the same way that in-person social interaction does. In her book, *Reclaiming Conversation*, Psychologist Sherry Turkle says "Face-to-face conversation is the most human-and humanizing---thing we do. Fully present to one another, we learn to listen." And we could all use some of that right now. Common decency has been replaced with anonymous shouting over each other, cruel or false statements with no accountability, and mockery or derision for people who have different views. We need the kind of empathy that results from in-person conversation. Neutral, public, social spaces where people can get together are more important than ever.

More people are getting interested in "mindful drinking", which promotes drinking less or not at all, but not giving up the social life that accompanies a night out. ClubSoda is a UK-based organization that gives moral support and helpful tips to people who are trying to drink less or stop drinking. One of the founders of ClubSoda said that after she stopped drinking several years ago, she attended an AA meeting and saw how much participants looked forward to going out after to have coffee and talk. AA emphasizes elements beyond the control of the

individual. Creating and maintaining social connections are an important way to achieve goals.

Even alcohol industries are recognizing this trend. The CEO of the world's largest alcohol company, ABInbev, has plans to greatly invest in the low or no alcohol category. Carlos Brito noted that he hoped 25% of the revenue of his beer company would be no or low alcohol products by 2025.

If you're drinking when you go out, here are some steps to make sure you stay safe.

Educate yourself: What is your drink?

A standard drink pour is 12 oz beer, 5 oz wine and 1.5 oz of liquor. Beer is usually sold in measured amounts such as a standard size bottle or a poured pint. But wine and spirits are "free poured" so the precise amount varies from drink to drink. And, some bar tenders like to give "generous pours" to a regular customer. The alcohol content of these products varies widely from 4.2% alcohol in a light beer to 10% in a double IPA and 10-17% for wine or 40-95% for spirits. This is even more complicated when a mixed drink contains several shots. Certain mixers speed up the body's absorption of alcohol; sugar will slow it down, diet drinks don't. And it pays to do your research-- some kinds of dark beers actually have less alcohol than light colored-beers. The way that alcohol affects a person can be different if they haven't eaten, are dehydrated, or are stressed.

Plan your ride

In most states the blood alcohol content over which driving is illegal is .08%. Over many years, the death rate for DUI has been reduced, but is now starting to creep back up. Every day 28 people in the US die in alcohol-related vehicle crashes--that's one person every 53 minutes. In 2013, the National Highway Safety Board announced its support for lowering the BAC level

to .05, believing it would save more lives since some impairment can happen at lower levels. But critics worry about the lack of enforcement resources for implementing a lower standard; and argue for more resources to enforce the .08 level. So far, only Utah has passed a law to lower BAC to .05. We do need to take steps to cut deaths on our highways due to alcohol misuse as we continue to see over 10,000 deaths annually. That is way too many.

The bottom line is you don't want to be driving over the BAC limit in your state, whether it is .08 or .05. If you will be drinking, you may want to plan on not driving. Make plans for how you'll get home before you head out. Make arrangements with a designated driver, or make sure you have info on hand for local cabs or ride services.

Hydrate!

Drinking water between alcoholic drinks is a good way to keep from drinking too quickly and avoiding dehydration. In New Zealand, having water available to patrons has been written into law: bars are required to make available free water as part of the 2012 The Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act.

Consider the "mindful drinking" campaign

Organizations such as ClubSoda, Hello Sunday Morning, and Better Drinking Culture have some good tips for enjoying yourself without drinking too much. They have great ideas for improving refusal skills and tips for changing your behavior around drinking without having to give up the social interactions we all need to stay sane.

Consider drinking low alcohol or no alcohol products

There are a lot more of them now and they are of better quality. Brewers, vintners and distillers have gotten hip to the idea that not everyone wants to drink alcohol, and have started focusing on the market for low and non-alcoholic drinks. Beer, wines, even spirits, are now available.

More than 5 million people signed up for Dry January in 2016, and after participating, 67% said that they will be cutting back, 8% say that they will stay dry. The event is promoted by the UK's Alcohol Concern as a charity fundraiser and a way to make people think about their drinking habits. Dry January has spread beyond the UK and is likely to keep growing.

Licensees that understand new patterns of behavior will stock no and low alcohol products and brush up on their mock-tail repertoire. Non-drinking patrons will likely spend on drinks that make them feel special, too.

Links:

<https://fortune.com/2016/07/13/non-alcoholic-beer/>
<https://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/dry-january>
<https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drunk-driving>
<https://joinclubsoda.co.uk/>
<https://betterdrinkingculture.org/>
<https://www.hellosundaymorning.org/>