

YOUTH CAN'T DRINK ALCOHOL IF ADULTS DON'T SUPPLY IT

For years we have had education in the classrooms, youth rallies, special events, school policies and even laws designed to encourage youth (those under 21 years of age) to CHOOSE NOT to drink alcohol. Through all of this a critical factor has been missing: the choices and influence of adults. The drinking of alcohol is promoted throughout our society via media (tv, print, radio, computers, etc.), advertising, peer expectations (perceived and real), but primarily by youth observing adult drinking behaviors as well as adult reactions to drinking situations.

In any number of ways, most of which we are not aware of, it is the adults who encourage and even supply the alcohol that underage youth drink. As adults we encourage drinking alcohol by ignoring the research, playing the odds that our kids will be safe and rationalizing that youth drinking is not that big of a deal. A problem with this thinking is that when there is an automobile crash or an alcohol poisoning episode it becomes a HUGE deal.

ADULTS SUPPLY ALCOHOL

Adults supply the alcohol youth drink in a number of ways:

- 1) A distracted store clerk doesn't properly check ID.
- 2) Unknowingly when youth use fake ID.
- 3) An older sibling or friend purchases the alcohol.
- 4) Strangers agree to buy the alcohol thinking they are doing a favor.
- 5) Most often, however, youth get alcohol from the home. Right next to the milk and leftovers is beer and/or wine coolers. Perhaps the liquor cabinet is unlocked or unsupervised.
- 6) Then there are adults that knowingly supply alcohol to youth believing it isn't a big problem or that if they are drinking at home they are not driving on the road. (Although, unless the youth is drinking alone, the friends are going to be driving to their homes while under the influence of alcohol.)

WHY THIS IS A BIG DEAL

The health and safety of our youth depend upon adult wisdom and guidance. At one time the data wasn't so clear. Today we know that:

- 1) The human brain does not finish developing until we are in our mid-20's and alcohol consumption slows and even interrupts this development, especially memory and learning.
- 2) Underage drinking is the leading contributor to death from injuries which is the main cause of death for those under age 21.
- 3) Underage drinking is a casual factor in a host of serious problems including;
 - a. Homicide,
 - b. Suicide,
 - c. Traumatic injury,
 - d. Drowning,
 - e. Burns,
 - f. Car crashes,
 - g. Violent crime,
 - h. Property crime,
 - i. High risk sex,
 - j. Date rape,
 - k. Giving birth to a fetal alcohol syndrome baby,
 - l. Alcohol poisoning,
 - m. and more.
- 4) The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) found that adults who began drinking at age 16 or younger drove drunk, suffered unintentional injuries, and became dependent on alcohol at about twice the rate as those whose onset of drinking occurred at age 21 years or older.



NOT A MINOR PROBLEM

- With over 15 million people addicted to alcohol in the U.S., the abuse of alcohol is not a minor problem.

- With 28% of Montcalm County 11th graders reporting they have been binge* drinking in the past 30 days, the abuse of alcohol is not a minor problem.
(*Binge drinking is defined as 5 drinks for males and 4 drinks for females within a short period of time.)

- When adults fail to take the initiative to prevent the drinking that is enmeshed with so many problems, the abuse of alcohol is beyond a minor problem. It is a failing of adult guidance.

Although many adults are clear regarding their view on youth not using alcohol, it will only be when the community speaks together that we will see important changes and stronger, safer communities for our children to grow and thrive in.

Please consider joining with the members of Montcalm Coalition to Prevent Underage Drinking, adding your voice to the importance of lowering the rates of underage drinking in Montcalm County.

For more information or to inquire about adding your voice the MCPUD's efforts, you may email us at info@mcpud.org or call 989-831-4591 or mail us at; MCPUD, P.O. Box 836, Stanton MI 48888.

THANK YOU!