



# Underage Drinking in Sonoma County 2010

## Think teen drinking is just a “right” of passage?

### THINK AGAIN.

NEW RESEARCH shows that alcohol affects a teenager’s developing brain differently than adults. Memory, learning and impulse control can be seriously impaired and the risk of addiction goes up significantly.

“The brain goes through dynamic changes during adolescence, and alcohol can seriously damage long and short-term growth processes” (AMA, 2003).



#### CHILDREN WHO LEARN ABOUT DRUG RISKS FROM THEIR PARENTS ARE UP TO 50% LESS LIKELY TO USE ALCOHOL.

A national survey found that parents underestimated the importance of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in the lives of teenagers. Twenty-eight percent of teens reported that alcohol and other drugs are the number one problem facing people their age, compared to only 17% of parents who thought this.

SOURCES:  
American Medical Association  
The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University CASA.  
<http://www.casacolumbia.org/articlefiles/380-2008%20Teen%20Survey%20Report.pdf>



#### KNOW WHERE YOUR CHILDREN ARE AND WHAT THEY ARE DOING.

##### SET CLEAR AND CONSISTENT RULES

If children hear a clear “no use” message they are 42% less likely to try alcohol and other drugs. Children, including teens, don’t want to lose their parent’s respect.

#### LISTEN TO YOUR CHILDREN

Children in families who eat dinner together are 33% less likely to use alcohol and other drugs. Find out what your children think about. Who are their friends? What do they do after school? What do they do at friends’ houses?

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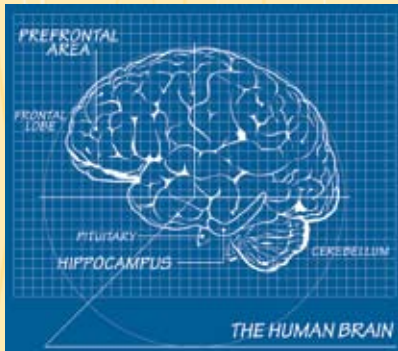
It is not a given that all teens will drink. The fact is that 30% of Sonoma County 11th graders have never had one full drink of alcohol.

Sonoma County Healthy Kids Survey,  
2006-07 and 2007-08



## Proceed with caution:

# BRAIN UNDER CONSTRUCTION.



The brain's hippocampus can be 10% smaller in underage drinkers.



### ALCOHOL ACTS LIKE A COMPUTER VIRUS IN THE BRAIN BY:

- Slowing or shutting down brain activity.
- Deleting or distorting neural messages.
- Damaging neuro-connections.
- Hindering formation of mature brain wiring.
- Rewiring a brain's pleasure-reward system, which can lead to alcohol dependence/addiction.

THE BRAIN goes through rapid development and “wiring” changes during the ages of 12-21. Teen alcohol use can damage this development that is essential to becoming a mature, thoughtful, responsible adult.

### ALCOHOL CAN DAMAGE TWO KEY BRAIN AREAS:

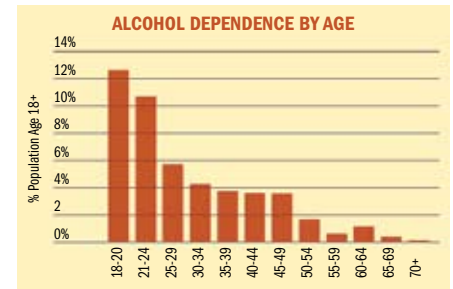
The **prefrontal area** is responsible for thinking, planning, good judgment, decision-making and impulse control. Damage from alcohol during teen years can be long-term and irreversible.

The **hippocampus** is involved in learning and memory. Frequent drinkers may never be able to catch up in adulthood since alcohol inhibits systems crucial for storing new information.

SOURCE: American Medical Association Fact Sheet, 2003

### ADDICTION/DEPENDENCE

- Alcohol dependence is highest in the 18-20 and 21-24 year old groups (see graph).
- Children who start drinking before the age of 15 are 4 times more likely than those who start after age 21 to develop alcohol problems.
- The chances of becoming dependent decrease by 14% for every year of delay in the onset of alcohol use.



SOURCES: EIC and NIAAA, Spotlight on Underage Drinking, No. 22; The NSDUH Report, 10/22/04; Spear, L.P., The adolescent brain and age-related behavioral manifestations, Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews 24 (2000) 417-463.



### OTHER RISKS

#### RISKY BEHAVIORS

New research shows that teens are more prone to impulsive behaviors that put them at risk of injury and doing something they will regret when they are sober, including driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, fighting and unprotected sexual activity. When teens drink they are at higher risk to have unprotected sex and to be victims of sexual assault.

### ALCOHOL POISONING

16% of 9th graders and 32% of 11th graders in Sonoma County reported binge drinking in the 2007-08 Healthy Kids Survey. In addition to intoxication, binge drinking (drinking 4-5 drinks within 2 hours) can cause difficulty breathing, unconsciousness and death.

### ACADEMICS, ATHLETICS AND PERFORMANCE

Teens who use alcohol have higher rates of truancy and poorer performance in school. New research shows that the hippocampus of the adolescent brain can be 10% smaller in underage drinkers, impacting learning and memory.

Many teen athletes and other performers such as dancers and musicians underestimate the way in which alcohol use, even a few drinks, can reverse all their hard work and training. Consuming 5 or more drinks in one night can affect brain and body activities for up to 3 days. Moderate alcohol use (2-3 drinks) reduces endurance and affects performance for up to 48 hours after the last drink was consumed, and reduces motor coordination for up to 12-18 hours. Alcohol causes dehydration, slowing the body's ability to heal; prevents muscle recovery; depletes energy; inhibits the ability to learn new information; and hampers memory and retention.

SOURCE: Firth, Gina, M.A., Manzo, Luis, Ph.D.; For the Athlete: Alcohol and Athletic Performance. University of Notre Dame. 2004; <http://www.middlebury.edu/offices/healthed/>

# You make the difference.

## LET THEM KNOW WHAT YOU THINK.

THE TEEN and young adult years are not always easy. Youth often struggle with issues of self-identity, relationships, and how to become an independent adult. Try connecting with your child in a positive way: be a *consultant* not a *manager* in your teen's life. Start when they are young by helping your child understand the pros and cons involved with everyday situations; you will be helping them to develop decision making skills aligned with your family values. As children mature and their independence grows, they will be better able to apply this skill set in situations where the risks are even greater.

### PARENTS ARE STILL THE NUMBER ONE INFLUENCE IN THEIR CHILDRENS' LIVES



“What parents may not realize is that children say that **parental disapproval of underage drinking** is the key reason they have chosen not to drink.”

Charles Curie, SAMHSA Administration,  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

There are a lot of places where teens can get information about drugs and alcohol—including school education programs, peers, the internet and mass media.

Look for opportunities to share your values about the effects of alcohol and drugs and to teach your children about the risks. If there is an alcohol related accident in your local news—talk about how the accident will affect the lives of the drinker and the victims. Share your opinions about irresponsible drinking on TV or in the movies. You don't have to be critical or judgmental—you merely have to let your children know you think it is undesirable behavior with socially negative consequences.

### TIPS FOR PARENTS WHO THINK THEIR CHILD IS DRINKING

Remember, as parents these issues are very emotional, so try to remain calm and sensible when you speak to your child about suspected or know substance use, and hold off on having any conversations until your child is sober.

Here are some key points to follow:

- Parents need to reach an agreement about the issue BEFORE speaking to the child
- Let your children know you don't want them doing drugs or drinking
- Anticipate that your teen may try to deny use or involvement; make sure the conversation stays on track and that your expectations are known
- If the conversation does get off track (too much anger etc.), stop the interaction and make a plan to continue later
- Be clear with your rules, the consequences and make an agreement with your child
- If addiction runs in your family, be sure to discuss the added risks with your child
- Make sure your child understands that your concern and reasons for rules are because you love and care about them, and as their parent want to help them make safe, healthy decisions.



25% of 7th graders in Sonoma County have already had their first full drink.

*Most parents begin talking about alcohol use with their teens too late. Age 8 is not too early.*

**Start talking before they start drinking.**

Source: California Healthy Kids Survey (2007-2008)



### HELP CHILDREN REMAIN ALCOHOL-FREE

- Talk early and often
- If you drink, model responsible behavior
- If there is alcohol in the home or the home of your children's friends, make sure it is not accessible to them
- Teach your children the value of friendship and what it means to be a good friend
- Encourage alcohol-free activities
- Remain approachable to your children; they look to you to set boundaries and keep them safe
- Help kids say NO. Give them an out when they are offered to drink:

“No thanks, I'll get grounded”  
“Tried that once—made me really sick”

# Get informed.

## TAKE ACTION.



### MORE INFORMATION

[www.talk.org](http://www.talk.org)  
[www.news.drugfree.org](http://www.news.drugfree.org)  
[www.camy.org](http://www.camy.org)  
[www.alcoholpolicy.md.com](http://www.alcoholpolicy.md.com)  
[www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com)  
[www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underageddrinking/](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underageddrinking/)

### LINKS TO LOCAL RESOURCES

[www.socoyouth.org](http://www.socoyouth.org)  
[sonoma.networkofcare.org](http://sonoma.networkofcare.org)  
[www.sonomacounty.org/mcah](http://www.sonomacounty.org/mcah)

*This guide was developed by the Maternal, Child & Adolescent Health Advisory Board in collaboration with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services and supported by the community partners listed below.*



Copies of this guide may be found at:  
[www.sonoma-county.org/health/ph/data/](http://www.sonoma-county.org/health/ph/data/)

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### BECOME A PARENT ADVOCATE

The Surgeon General's Call to Action Report of 2007 clearly states that underage alcohol use is not inevitable and we are not powerless to stop it. We can change the cultural norms, policies, and conditions that accept or promote underage drinking and thereby reduce a host of wide ranging and devastating consequences.

A comprehensive plan that includes education, legislation and communication is needed in order to alter environments where alcohol is used. *Environmental Prevention* strategies achieve community-wide, sustained results by impacting availability, promotion and sales to minors. **We can all** do things that help our youth make good choices about alcohol.

**We can all** work together to limit alcohol access by young people.

- **Get involved!** Community coalitions exist in many parts of the county; join one today and help change alcohol policy and practice where you live! Call 707/565-6680 for a list of local coalitions.
- **Take the pledge** to not allow or provide alcohol consumption by minors in your home; join parents across Sonoma County and sign the Parent Pledge today! Call 707/565-6680 for info.
- **Support the passage and encourage compliance** with Social Host Ordinances (SHO). These ordinances give local law enforcement the ability to hold parents or other adults accountable for underage drinking that occurs in their home or on their property. As of February 2010, ordinances have been passed in the cities of Petaluma, Sonoma and Sebastopol.
- **Support policy and enforcement efforts** in your community that effectively reduce sales to minors, for example mandatory Responsible Beverage Service training for all employees/volunteers who sell or serve alcohol at stores, markets, bars and restaurants, and at special events.
- **Write a letter** and/or contact your City Council or Board of Supervisors to express support for local ordinances and efforts to reduce underage drinking.

### COMMON MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT TEEN ALCOHOL

Myth: "Alcohol is not a big deal compared to illicit drugs."

**FACT:** Alcohol is a factor in the three leading causes of deaths among 14-15 year olds: unintentional injuries, homicides and suicides.

Myth: "I don't need to worry about alcohol abuse with my child."

**FACT:** Over half of Sonoma County 11th graders report having been very drunk or sick after drinking alcohol. 31% have driven a car or been driven by someone that has been drinking.

Myth: "I don't need to worry because my child would never drink and drive."

**FACT:** Alcohol poisoning can cause death even if the teen never gets behind the wheel. Teach your teen to NEVER get into a car when the driver has been drinking.

Myth: "My teen can't become an alcoholic because she hasn't been drinking long enough."

**FACT:** It does not take years for dependency to develop and some children do develop problems that require professional help. When assessed by a mental health clinician or their physician, some children meet the diagnostic criteria for dependency. Adolescents who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence. For each year that the start of drinking is delayed, the risk of later alcohol dependence is reduced by 14%.

Myth: "What I say or do won't make a difference; teens only listen to their friends."

**FACT:** Research shows that parents can be very influential. Teenagers whose parents talk to them regularly about the dangers of drugs are 42% less likely to use drugs than those teens whose parents don't.

Myth: "My child knows everything about drinking, so there is no need to talk about it."

**FACT:** Many adults and teenagers have dangerous misconceptions about alcohol, believing that beer and wine are safer than hard liquor. They need to know that 12 oz of beer, 5 oz of wine and 1.5 oz of hard liquor all contain the same amount of alcohol and have the same effects on the body and mind.

#### BEER & WINE ARE NOT "SAFER" THAN HARD LIQUOR.

A 12-oz. can of beer, a 5-oz. glass of wine, and 1.5 oz. of hard liquor all have the same amount of alcohol and have the same effects on the body and mind.

