



Exposing the Myths of Teen Drinking – One Parent at a Time

Teen alcohol abuse is a dangerous reality in America. Each day 7,000 children under the age 16 take their first drink. As Dare CASA addresses this issue in our county, we have uncovered an abundance of beliefs in dangerous myths such as: “Underage drinking is a right of passage - what’s the big deal?” And: “I allow my kids to drink under my supervision so I can teach them responsible drinking.” Guided by untrue and erroneous information, far too many parents are allowing their teenagers to be in harm’s way. This article is meant to replace several common myths with the harsh reality about the dangers of teenage drinking.

Myth # 1 – “All teens drink, there’s nothing parents can do about it.” Yes, far too many teens drink alcoholic, but the truth is that the majority of 12 to 18 year olds nationally do not. According to a National Survey on Drug Use and Health, only about a quarter of the 12 to 20 year olds surveyed in North Carolina had consumed alcohol within the last 30 days. The 2005 Search Institute Self-Report Study reported that 37% of 7th-12th graders in Dare County admitted to drinking in the last 30 days. Although this is still an alarmingly high percentage, these teenagers remain in the minority.

Myth # 2 – “It is better to teach responsible drinking by supervising teen consumption at home.” The truth is that national studies repeatedly find that teens allowed to drink at home tend to drink as excessively, if not more so, than teens without such parental guidance. Plus, here is another important fact to know: Providing alcohol to a minor is illegal.

Myth # 3 – “Drinking is not really harmful.” On the contrary, current medical research concludes that alcohol usage by teens may result in the permanent loss of as much as 10% of brain power, and strongly documents the possibility of liver and growth damage. Teen drinkers are significantly more likely to develop long-term problems of alcohol dependency. Alcohol is a strong contributing factor in many high-risk behaviors of youth, including fatal traffic accidents, violent crime, suicides, vandalism, non-traffic accidents, inappropriate sexual behaviors, and unwanted pregnancies.

Medical research continues to uncover alarming evidence to support the major health and physical risk that alcohol consumption poses to underage drinkers. More than three million teens are estimated to be alcoholics, with several million more unable to manage their serious drinking problem.

Myth #4 – “Teenage girls don’t drink; it’s primarily a ‘guy’ thing.” The truth is that consumption of alcohol is growing at a faster rate among teenage girls than boys. Though the disparity in consumption rates between the sexes was once significant, the current percentage of consuming teenage males and females is approximately equal and binge drinking (five or more drinks in one setting) is on the rise among teen girls. Evidence confirms that females get drunk faster than males, and other evidence suggests that they become addicted faster.

So what’s a parent to do? National studies confirm that children who receive a firm, but loving non-use message at home are significantly less likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs. Drug- and alcohol-free kids cite parental disappointment as the primary reason for their choice to abstain. Despite what they may tell you, teenagers want their parents to act like parents and to be good role models. Are you a parent of a teenager? You do make a difference, and your child is the gifted beneficiary of your informed and responsible good judgment.

