

## **Involved Parents Make a Difference**

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Underage Drinking plagues our communities with property damage, an increase in crime, personal injury, and even death. The youth who engage in underage drinking generally do not set out to create mayhem. They believe drinking just means “a good time”. They don’t think about the future or fully understand the chance of negative consequences with their actions.

Young people don’t have to look far to see alcohol being advertised, served and consumed throughout society. Television has a love affair with alcohol. Many of the shows teens love to watch show kids partying and becoming intoxicated. It’s a challenge for parents. Do we use this time to educate our kids on the dangers and consequences of drinking or do we dismiss it as only a television show and say nothing? I’m not one to believe that television, music or movies make kids do bad things. But constant exposure to unacceptable behavior being treated as acceptable behavior must be met with parental involvement and actions to instill our beliefs in the minds of our children by using the show as a platform to discuss the dangers of underage drinking.

Music is another potential negative influence. Music of all genres makes wide mention of alcohol and drug use. Our kids listen to it on their radios, on their iPods and in their cars. Again, parental involvement is the best reaction. We should educate ourselves on youth and music lyric terminology, so we know what words mean when we hear them. Just like with television, when our children hear songs about going out in the woods and drinking all night that can send a message of society’s acceptance of the behavior.

When teenagers get this misperceived idea of society’s acceptance of drinking alcohol, then they too feel the urge to mimic what they have seen or heard. They must then find the alcohol to consume. However, “Underage Drinking” is preventable. Teenagers get the majority of their alcohol from an adult – sometimes their own parents. The common mistake many parents make is saying or thinking “not my child”. Let’s face it... even good kids make bad choices sometimes. If we are not involved enough in their lives to help guide and change the behavior, then the odds of them making mistakes are substantial.

As a former police officer and presently an instructor of the Early Intervention Program (EIP) at Seven Counties Services, I have seen firsthand what happens when parents don’t take their child’s drug and alcohol use seriously. My favorite exercise in the EIP class has the youth write down nine things that are important to them and they are told to also write down partying. The youth are then informed that something bad has happened and they have to choose three things that they must give-up forever. The youth almost instantly mark out partying first, but then they struggle with the other two. After they mark out three items, I then tell them something else bad has happened and they must mark out three more items. I can always see the strain in the youths’ eyes. Family is almost always one of the items remaining. No doubt, youth view their family as a very important part of their lives and we owe it to them to help them succeed in life.

I then tell them the purpose of this exercise. The exercise let them choose what they lost, but in real life, they lose without choosing. With alcohol and drug use they could lose any of the things important to them at any time. Even though this is a role play exercise, the youth really take it seriously when it comes to marking out the things in their lives they care about. As parents, we need to remind them what is important in life and give them the tools and guidance to get there.

If you suspect your child may be experimenting with drugs or alcohol, please consider the Early Intervention Program for assessment and education. The EIP, Local information and resources are available by contacting the Seven Counties Services’ Regional Prevention Center at 502-589-8600 or by going online at <http://www.sevencounties.org/> and clicking on “Prevention” under the “Our Services” tab. For an exciting opportunity for youth to become involved in efforts to reduce underage drinking, log onto <http://www.reelactionky.com/>