

## *Kids and Alcohol*

### *The Problem:*

Even though the legal age for drinking alcohol is 21 years, many young kids in United States consume alcohol at a very early age. Children experiment during the young age and many times drink alcohol to get drunk. They do not know the serious effects of alcohol on their body. Habits like binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks in a row) are observed in children as young as 13 years. Most children begin drinking at thirteen- to-fifteen years age. A minority of youth may meet the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) criteria for alcohol dependence.

Children should know that alcohol is a drug and depresses the body functions. Alcohol slows down the ability to think and react. Everyone is affected by alcohol differently based on their body weight and amount of alcohol consumed. Drinking large amounts of alcohol over short periods of time can cause sudden death from stopping oxygen to reach the brain. Children should know these effects so they can make informed decisions regarding alcohol at an early stage.

### *Prevalence in children:*

The prevalence of alcohol use in 2001 increased from 2.6 percent at age 12 to 67.5 percent for people aged 21 years. One in four children, younger than 18 years is exposed to alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence in the family. Particularly, 13 – 15 years old are at high risk to begin drinking. In an annual survey of alcohol consumption levels, 26% of eighth graders and 40% of tenth graders have reported drinking alcohol within the past month. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance shows that most children have their first drink of alcohol by age 13. Even though alcohol intake has slightly decreased from 37.5% in 1990 to 29.1% in 2001, the prevalence rates still cause a great concern on child health. Boys drink alcohol more than girls. In 2000, one in five underage teens was involved in binge drinking. Alcohol use is also associated with use of other forms of illicit drugs among the young.

### *Facts:*

- Forty two percent of ninth graders have consumed alcohol before they were 13 years.
- Children of alcoholics are more likely than children of non alcoholics to initiate alcohol early.
- Alcohol advertising encourages 56% of school children from 5<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade to drink.
- 2.6 million teenagers do not know that a person can die from an alcohol overdose.
- Almost 10 million junior and senior high school teenagers drink monthly.
- Over 65% teenagers believe drinking makes them feel good, helps to forget problems.
- Teenagers drink because others do it or there is nothing else to do.
- Best predictor of risky sexual behavior among teenagers is alcohol or drug abuse.
- Two thirds of the teenagers who drink report that they can buy their own alcohol.
- Girls consume alcohol and binge drink equal to the rates boys do.
- 40% of children, who start drinking before age 15, will become alcoholics in future.
- If the onset of drinking is delayed by 5 years, a child's risk of alcohol problems is decreased by 50%.

### *Alcohol and child safety/ health:*

- Children are more prone to physical, emotional and sexual abuse.
- Children driving under influence may face dangerous risks on the roads.
- Children engaged in drunk driving may be killed in alcohol-related crashes.

- Children aged 12-16 years, who drink may experience high levels of psychological distress and serious behavior problems.
- Alcohol can lead to most suicide and homicide deaths in children.
- Children who drink will have higher diastolic blood pressure compared to kids who do not drink.
- Girls who drink will have higher levels of Estradiol (an estrogen) and Testosterone, contributing to increased risk of specific diseases like cancer and substance abuse.
- Girls who drink are four times more likely to suffer depression than their non-drinking counterparts.

### ***What can teachers do?***

Teachers should tell actual alcohol consumption rates among children. This will allow children to know accurately how big the problem is. Improve social norms in the class room. Involve children in the class projects that help them analyze bad effects of alcohol. Make them visit and interview community groups and organizations which deal with alcohol issues. Children can contribute literary work expressing their concerns and opinions related to alcoholism in school journal and local news papers. Involve children in debates and discussions in class. Encourage art, poetry, literary works related to alcohol. Develop or use a successful alcohol prevention curriculum for the class.

### ***What can parents do?***

Bring the change at home. Children don't drink due to peer pressure, but more to combat boredom and stress. Parents to keep children engaged in their interests and motivate them. Parents should role model their lifestyles sending negative messages to children regarding alcohol. Encourage neighbors and friends to do the same. Communicate with children openly and build social skills, self esteem, love and value among children. Make children practice rejection skills when some one offers them alcohol. Plan and spend time with children on a daily basis. Set rules at home in accordance to the experiences children may have outside their homes. Beware of alcohol use in the community and set deals and pacts with children. Reduce availability of alcohol at home, make homes safe, host responsible parties, and minimize media influence on kids. Talk to their teachers at school and be aware of the child's environment. Imbibe family values and ideals and reward children to uphold parent's trust.

***More information related to alcohol problem in children and prevention strategies found at:*** [www.ncadd.org](http://www.ncadd.org)

[www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)

[www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures.htm](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures.htm)

[www.od.nih.gov/ORMH/mhi/research/alcoholism.htm](http://www.od.nih.gov/ORMH/mhi/research/alcoholism.htm)

#### **Parent Resources:**

[www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/kids\\_and\\_alcohol.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/kids_and_alcohol.html)

[www.alcoholfreechildren.org/gs/pubs/html/Prev.htm](http://www.alcoholfreechildren.org/gs/pubs/html/Prev.htm)

[www.pta.org//parentinvolvement/helpchild/oc\\_teensalcohol.asp](http://www.pta.org//parentinvolvement/helpchild/oc_teensalcohol.asp)

#### **Teacher Resources:**

[www.health.org/govpubs/PHD822/acc.htm](http://www.health.org/govpubs/PHD822/acc.htm)

<http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov>

[www.tanglewood.net/products/allstars/article1995.htm](http://www.tanglewood.net/products/allstars/article1995.htm)

#### **Kids Resources:**

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

[www.health.org/features/kidsarea.aspx](http://www.health.org/features/kidsarea.aspx)

[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

#### **References:**

National Institutes of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, NIH Publication no: 96-4153, revised 2001. Available at <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

Grant, B.F., & Dawson, D.A. Age at onset of alcohol use and association with DSM IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the national Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiological Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9:103-110, 1997.