

Holiday parties and family get-togethers are integral parts of the holiday season. When alcohol is present, you may be asking yourself if it's okay to allow your teenager to have a drink to celebrate the occasion. Some parents feel that "teaching teens to drink responsibly" will lead to more thoughtful and less destructive behavior. Others believe that allowing their teenager to drink at home will make it less likely that their teenager will drink elsewhere. Current research, however, proves otherwise (SADD).

- **Teens who are allowed to drink at home are significantly more likely to drink with their friends.** 57% of teens who reported their parents allow them to drink at home also drink with their friends compared with 14% of teens who reported their parents do not allow them to drink at home also drink with their friends (SADD).
- **Teens are twice as likely to binge drink and use alcohol within a 30-day period if their parents or friends' parents provided alcohol at their home for a party** (Journal of Adolescent Health, 2004).
- **65% of underage youth who drink get alcohol from family and friends** (Century Council).

Why is this concerning?

- Young people who start drinking under the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21. The risk for abuse and dependence decreases steadily and significantly with each increasing year of age of drinking onset (NIDA).
- Alcohol use by teens affects still-developing cognitive abilities and impairs memory and learning (SADD).
- Teens who drink are more likely to commit or be the victim of violence (including sexual assault) and to experience stress, depression, and suicidal thoughts (SADD).
- Allowing a teenager to drink at home is allowing him/her to break the law.

What can parents do?

Talk with your teenager about alcohol use, set clear expectations for behavior and enforce consequences for violating the rules (SADD). Be a resource for your teenager by initiating honest, non-judgmental conversation. Be curious about your child's experiences or ideas rather than lecture. The car is a great place to talk with your child, but keep it short. Research suggests that an average child's attention span (in minutes) is about as long as the age of the child. And last but not least, be a positive role model.

- 7 in 10 high school teens rate their parents the most influential in their decisions not to drink (Teens Today).
- Parental objection is the second most important reason kids give for not using alcohol (NIAAA).

Have a safe holiday season.

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