

In Their Words:
Alcohol and Teens



2007 Findings

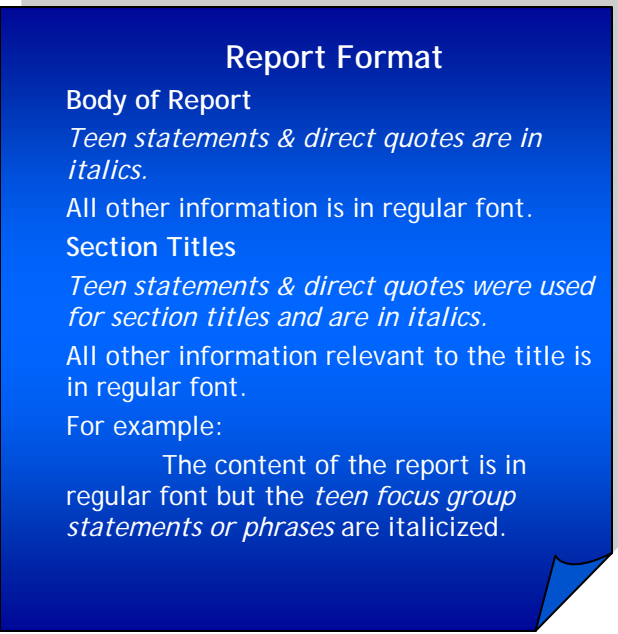
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in cooperation with the
St. Johns County School District

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Introduction

In an effort to understand their adolescent children, it is common for parents to reflect on their teen years for answers. While issues such as rebelliousness, peer pressure and sexual activity are areas of concern for every generation, the means by which they cope with these issues is not. As times change, it is easy to acknowledge that teen coping skills may be different than they were twenty years ago, but it can be even more difficult to recognize how different they really are.

This report is not intended to be a scientific, stand alone analysis of teen attitudes and behaviors regarding alcohol. Instead, it is part of a comprehensive assessment which includes key informant interviews, independent reports and quantitative surveys. It is the Coalition's hope that "In Their Words" triggers an open, communitywide discussion on underage drinking by going beyond 'how many?' and beginning to answer the question 'Why?'.


Since the Coalition began in 2004, community members have asked for more than just the number of teens drinking alcohol and related statistics. They wanted stories, explanations and honest answers from the teens themselves. In late 2006, plans for the first teen focus groups were made. The Coalition partnered with the St. Johns County School District to organize and conduct this data gathering exercise.

Because the intent of this project was not to offer a scientifically sound explanation for underage drinking and the issues surrounding it but instead be a catalyst for discussion and further examination, the number of participants is not purported to be demographically representative of the St. Johns County school population.

Six groups were conducted between January-May 2007. Each group consisted of between 5-8 juniors and seniors who held leadership positions in their respective class. The participants came from Bartram Trail High School, Nease High School, Pedro Menendez High School, and St. Augustine High School. Each school's principal chose the participants. Student leaders were selected to ensure the results did not

Report Format

Body of Report

Teen statements & direct quotes are in italics.

All other information is in regular font.

Section Titles

Teen statements & direct quotes were used for section titles and are in italics.

All other information relevant to the title is in regular font.

For example:

The content of the report is in regular font but the *teen focus group statements or phrases* are italicized.

reflect the behavior of those identified as high-risk and allow the analysis of the results to dismiss underage drinking as a problem amongst only high-risk youth.

Questions were chosen to solicit answers that adults have asked over the past two years that could not be adequately answered quantitatively. Because of the qualitative, discussion-like nature of each group, the report is written in the same style. The analysis of the teen responses surrounds the statements made by focus group participants.

Not every statement made by the teens during the six focus groups is included but instead those statements which best represent common ideas or themes are included. The answers from the original questions are grouped into four sections, each addressing a different aspect of underage drinking. These answers make up the body of the report.

A summary analysis of the project and a call to action for this community are included in the Community Conclusions section. The Works Cited follows.

Section Descriptions

I. Grown Up is College Age: Influencing Teens

Teens discuss the level of outside influence impacting their decision to drink.

II. I Just Want to Be Messed Up: Reasons for Drinking

Teens' perception of alcohol consumption, its positive and negative effects, and justifications for their behavior. Four categories were identified in the analysis.

III. Say Party, Think Alcohol: Drinking Behaviors

Discussion of alcohol consumption at parties, school and school-related functions. Driving under the influence (DUI) is included in this section.

IV. If Its Alcohol, We'll Drink It: Sources and Preferences

This multi-faceted section covers the sources of teen alcohol, alcohol preferences and ways alcohol consumption is made even more dangerous.

*IV. Teens Speak: Advice for Parents**

Several focus group sessions were followed by a teen panel discussion called Teen Speak. In the program, the parents developed questions for the teens and once screened, were allowed to ask the questions.

Community Conclusions

A summary of the next steps the community must take to minimize the negative consequences that teens are creating for themselves today and in the future.

***NOTE: Information in this section is the opinion of teens and does NOT include expert recommendations for parenting.**

I. *Grown Up is College Age*: Influencing Teens' Decision to Drink

It is a commonly held belief that a teen's peer group is the most powerful influence on changing their behavior. Emerging from the focus groups' observations were four different influences teens cited as most influential on their choices about alcohol and related behaviors. Older siblings were mentioned briefly as having a bigger impact than parents because if there is no older sibling, the path to underage drinking slows down considerably. This issue was raised at only one of the six sessions.

Policy and Enforcement

The teens talked a great deal about consequences throughout the project. The teens felt consequences imposed by parents and outside entities were both important. If *kids see kids getting away without consequences, they believe they can too*. Teens saw unfair application of policies or laws including one example of *nepotism getting one kid off*, which was a source of frustration for that teen. When there isn't enforcement at home, at school and on the street, teens interpret it as an endorsement of underage drinking. None of the participants complained about consequences if they are being uniformly enforced.

Media Messages

Media has seen the greatest changes in the past twenty years with technological advances such as the internet and cellular phones. These two forms of technology have allowed media to come into our lives more often thereby making a more personal impact. According to the US Small Business Administration, the youth of today have more disposable income than any before them and marketers know it. Teens in the focus groups felt that *alcohol is glorified* throughout media. It happens not only in direct advertising but in the cultural norms supported by media messages such as the passage from age 20 to 21. At ages 17 and 18, these teens believed that *media and people make the fact that turning 21 is exciting because you can drink - you can use your ID now*. Teens also identified *grown-up is college age*. The excessive alcohol use promoted by the media and the entertainment industry as normal college behavior, has been interpreted by some teens a model of acceptable adult behavior.

They noted the advertisements which are commonplace in *restaurants* as one example of alcohol messages located in places they frequent. The content of media messages was also important. One teen noted that *advertisements are trying to get kids to drink by using colors, cartoons, flashy advertisements and celebrities*. There was widespread agreement about this tactic. Comedy played a large role in their perception of advertising and the subtle messages from programming. *Commercials*

selling alcohol are always happy. Super Bowl commercials were offered as examples. Entertainment was also cited, most notably television because *T.V. programs that show drunk people are funny.*

While many teens saw the media as being influential, they believed it had a greater impact on younger teens. Teens felt strongly about the ineffectiveness of public service announcements at influencing high school age teens' behavior. *Service announcements are not effective to most teens* regardless of the content. *Ads talk down to teens and make kids feel unintelligent.* They went on to say that *it's too late at this age - advertising the dangers is more important for younger kids.* This 17-18 year old age group felt that *ads should be directed toward younger kids such as middle-school (students).*

Peers

The teens who participated in the focus groups acknowledged very little negative peer pressure at their age. Although some stated that *peer pressure still applies, a lot,* not all teens agreed. Those in disagreement argued that peer pressure is *not as much (an influence) as people think.* *It (drinking) is a culture thing mostly—connects them to peers/teen culture.* Instead of pressuring each other, *peers leave people alone who don't want to drink.* And because alcohol is not free, teens supported their claim of limited negative peer pressure with the explanation of *not planning to waste good beer on someone who doesn't want to drink it anyway.* *That doesn't make any sense.* Teens' view of themselves as confident and self-aware seems to have played a large role in their decision whether or not to drink. They felt impervious to peer pressure because *in high school, you know who you want to be.* *In middle school, it is who you want others to think you are.*

Those who did not recognize the negative role peer pressure can play did acknowledge the positive role it can play in keeping friends out of harm's way. They shared how *kids do look out for each other* in party situations. Friends will look out for each other's safety even going as far as to *fight with friend to keep them from driving.* They state they will *protect each other from dangerous situations and may not allow someone to drink because of a (perceived) problem.* All caretaking behavior stems from the fact that *there is a respect between each other.* Teens varied on the role peer pressure played in drinking. And while most agreed they tend to their friends safety, another point was unanimous. *If none of your friends drink, you won't drink either.*

(See Page 9 for more information on Peer Influence.)

Parents

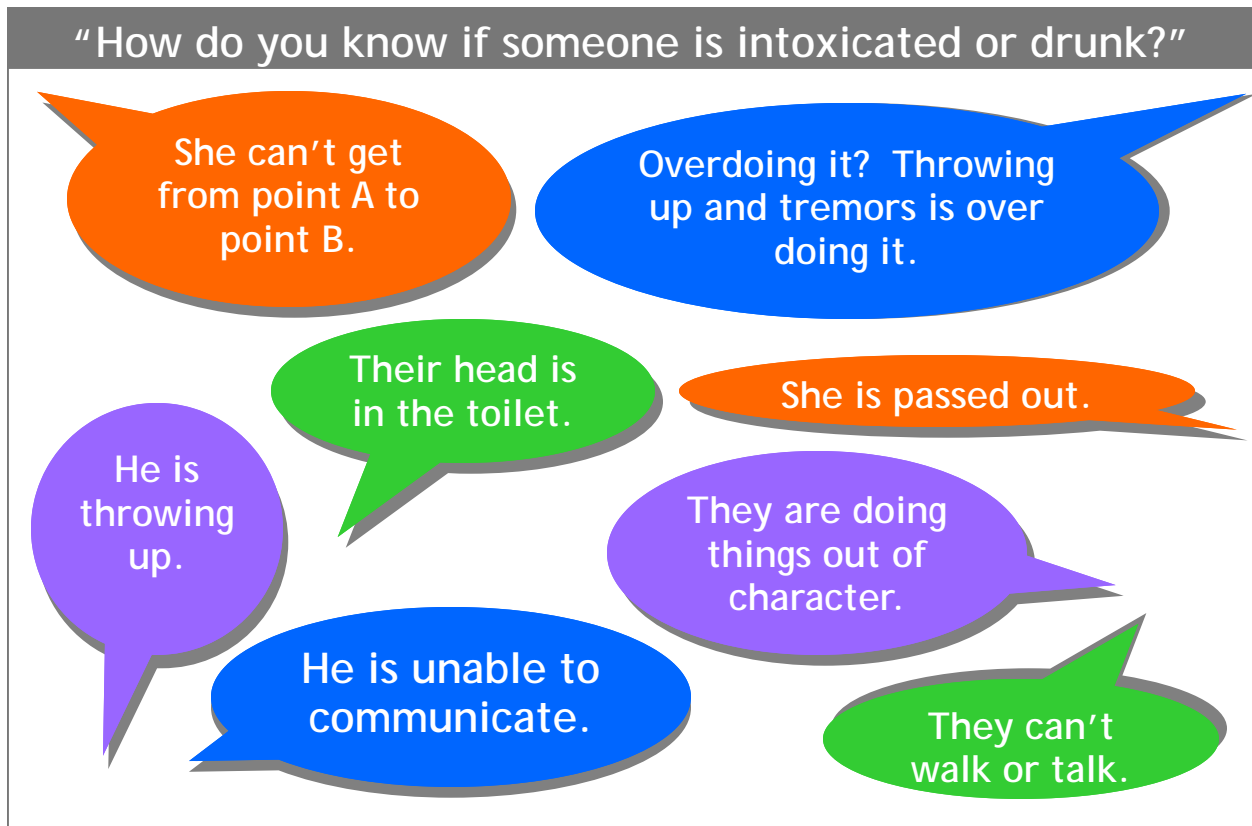
Like peers, parents can play a positive or negative role in their teen's behavior. Sometimes *adults warn kids to stay away from alcohol*, and their child *kept drinking, getting caught, over and over and was (finally) allowed to drink with them (parents)*. Teens believe *parents think that kids need to experiment and make their own choices*. They also pay close attention to what behaviors parents are modeling as evidenced by the statement that *if parents drink, kids are more likely to drink*. There was disagreement about how the parent relationship affects a child's propensity to drink. While many teens believed that *kids who don't like their parents are likely to drink*, other students countered with the personal experiences of *knowing parents and kids who get along (with each other) and (the) kids still drink*. A minority of teens shared that parents' behavior and attitudes about alcohol impacts teens. They felt when a parent doesn't want their child to drink, then *the parents shouldn't drink in front of kids*.

II. *I Just Want to Be Messed Up*: Beliefs About Alcohol

Adults want to know why kids take risks, including drinking alcohol. Many of the same answers are given by experts and as this report demonstrates, teens. It is important to note that while the teens shared many statements they believe answer the question of 'why teens drink?', the answers are complex and were different for each person. Before getting into the areas discussed most among the participants, their views of gender, age, and inebriation should be noted.

Teens' perception is that alcohol is more important to a boy than a girl at an early age is evidenced by the comment that *girls begin drinking later*. According to the 2006 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS), that while boys do begin at a younger age, the difference is only 6 months (Florida Department of Children and Families). Teens believed that *girls and boys drink same number of days per week*. The FYSAS shows that in the past 30-days boys drank at a 16% higher rate than girls.

Evidence of teens' poor assessment of *getting drunk* came from answers given about what "drunk" meant to them. Focus group participants offered the statements below as indicators of intoxication. This misinformation leads to teens making poor choices with life-altering consequences, including alcohol poisoning and driving under the influence. Because *many high school students don't drink casually, they drink to get drunk*, the chances for harm are greater than ever.



Personal Beliefs

There were students who chose not to drink alcohol and were very vocal about it. After listening to several stories about underage drinking students, one student emphatically stated that *a lot of kids don't drink - it's not a necessity*. In another session, a high school senior shared how life threatening consequences affected her behavior: *I have never had a drink - because I choose not to. It's my choice. I have friends that were in car crashes*. One student couldn't understand getting drunk at all. She shared that *most alcohol tastes like crap. Something is wrong if kids can drink so much alcohol*.

Throughout the sessions, teens shared their personal beliefs about drinking for the purpose of getting drunk. After the statements were compiled and analyzed, four distinct but related categories emerged. Of special interest is the contradiction between the statements in the Self and Social spheres. Teens were emphatic that the decision to drink was an independent one (first person perspective), but when discussing why teens drank (third person perspective), teens acknowledged the social pressures to drink.



III. Say “Party”, Think Alcohol: Drinking Behavior

Caring adults want to look into the world of teens to discover exactly where teens find the opportunity to drink. A question was posed about “secret” language for announcing to peers there was a party. They answered that *if your child says party, that means a get together with alcohol*. Not only is language different today than it was for a generation ago, but so is the way that teens consume alcohol.

Parties

The teens surveyed all perceived themselves to be responsible partygoers even though they shared the practice that if you *say party, think alcohol*. Two examples the teens gave as ways they practice safe partying were the use of a *DD (designated driver)* and making sure that you *party at people’s house you know*. After all, *it is not safe to wake up in a strange house. Anything could happen*. Another commented that *I like to be in a comfortable place to drink - not at parties or in crowds*, as an example of healthy self-care.

When asked why teens drink at parties, several stated that *parties are mostly about drinking*. The scenario of a group of teens standing around a keg talking with a red cup in their hand was put forth to comment on. Overwhelmingly, the teens said that this situation rarely happens because the point of drinking is to drink *a lot of whatever is available*. The purpose of going to a party *for high school students is to get drunk* and this is evidenced by the statement that there is *always alcohol if they are going to a party, especially if no adult is home*.

Q: If there are 10 kids at a party...

A: 1 is a designated driver
9 are drinking alcohol
4 are smoking weed
2 are popping pills

Alcohol is not simply an enhancement to socializing, it is seen as an activity within itself. Teens stated that *drinking/partying is an inexpensive way to get 40 good friends together*. While *hanging around playing cards and drinking beer is fun*, other, more dangerous activities are even more common. Put simply, *drinking games are big*. *Drinking games are a way to open up the party and get things going*. Games such as *kings (card game)* are *competitive*. With the inability of teens to recognize dangerous levels of intoxication among each other, the risk of alcohol poisoning among this age group is significant.

School

Parties are not the only situation in which teens drink alcohol. It was reported that teens had *seen kids drunk at school a couple of times but not as much during school because fear of getting caught*. If kids are seen intoxicated at school, three observations were repeated throughout the groups: kids kept *vodka in a water bottle* so that it would not be detected; *"easy" days it is most common* for kids to drink in school because of lower demands when they perceive sobriety is not required; and the third reason intoxication during school hours is allowed to continue is that *teachers don't want to take time to address the issue*.

While there is drinking during school hours, it takes place *mainly at after school activities and during sports events* such as games, dances, field trips, and ceremonies. Of all these activities, the *greatest number of intoxicated kids is at sporting events*. Most athletes report limited use during the athletic season. However, because physical performance is not paramount when not competing, *athletes use in the off-season*. Subtle differences in the preferences between each sport's drug of choice were also discussed. While alcohol is used more often than any other drug, not all teens use only alcohol. While *football and basketball (primarily) drink alcohol, lacrosse and soccer (also) smoke weed (marijuana)*.

All the places teens report drinking have two similarities: drinking in a group setting and the perception that adults are either apathetic about underage drinking or condone it through their actions. The majority of teens report they don't have reason to believe their behavior is unhealthy or justifiably illegal or that they are in fear of negative consequences of any kind.

Driving Under the Influence

With high school partying comes teen driving, so teens were also asked about driving under the influence. Some teens mentioned that it is rare among teens because *we learned in school and from our parents not to drink and drive*. These comments were not universal and it was reported that driving under the influence (among teens) happens *more often than you think*. At some schools, it was reported to happen among the students a *lot*.

Underage DUI

It's illegal to drive a motor vehicle with a BAC of .02 or higher if under the age of 21.

An underage 240 lb. male reaches the legal limit after one drink.

An underage 120 lb. female is twice the legal limit (.04) after one drink.

1 drink=1 1/4 oz. 80-proof liquor, 12 oz. beer, or 4 oz. table wine

University of Oklahoma Police Department
Blood Alcohol Calculator

The teens were asked for reasons why teens continue to drive under the influence, in spite of their knowledge about the dangers. Many gave answers similar to those heard from adults. One response was that *kids believe "I'm not far away" and so they can make it home* was given as a reasonable response to the question. The teens also have a misconception about what driving under the influence means physically and legally. They characterized *people who get charged with DUI are really, really heavy drinkers*. They further explained that if they are not perceived as really heavy drinkers, they are unlikely to consume the amount of alcohol necessary to reach the legal limit for Driving Under the Influence and receive a DUI. Teens were not aware that the Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) level for impairment in under 21 drivers is much lower (.02) than for drivers 21 and over (.08) (Florida Department of Transportation).

IV. If It's Alcohol, We'll Drink It: Sources and Preferences

Parents

While most parents do not provide alcohol to their underage children, some do. There are some who *will usually buy on special occasions such as prom, graduation, homecoming, New Years* and some who *won't buy at all*. Many of the instances involving parents providing alcohol began because *parents would rather their kid stay home* and they be able to supervise them in order to keep them safe. Many teens repeated the adult belief that *it's okay to drink at home (like at parties, birthdays, graduations, proms), as long as everyone stays at the house and/or hands over their keys*.

The teens reported that some parents want to forge a closer bond with their child so *parents drink with kids*. The *parents sometimes offer some of what they are having* and this leads to teens consuming the alcohol in the house at will.

Many teens were quick to point out that *most parents don't buy it for their kids*. Some young people freely expressed their disapproval of underage drinking and did not appear to be intimidated by the other teens in the groups sharing personal experiences of drinking. Abstinent teens took a dim view of *parents who provide alcohol being irresponsible parents who (only) want to be the cool parent*. These teens believed that parents who serve their children *should question just how much they love their kid*.

Alcohol Type

Teens claim that while alcohol is easily accessible, the choices may still be limited. As to be expected, *availability dictates choice of alcohol* for underage drinkers. Given a choice, girls and boys do have definite preferences in their alcohol consumption. Repeatedly, girls mentioned sweet, fruity drinks called alcopops. According to the American Medical



Association, this is no accident. Alcopops were developed for and continue to be marketed to the under 25 female crowd. On the other hand, boys are less discriminating. Both groups agreed that preferences aside, *if it's alcohol, we'll drink it.*

Alcohol and Prescription Medication

Prescription drug abuse among teens is a growing trend in St. Johns County (Department of Children and Families). Not only are teens engaging in this dangerous practice but they are taking it a step further. The focus groups shared that *mixing alcohol and drugs is common.* When asked just how common this practice was, they stated that 10-20% of students using alcohol are also using



prescription pills for recreational purposes. Through experimentation they have found that *alcohol enhances pills* making any risks faced worth the high. The most popular drug cocktails included *hydrocodone, anti-depressants, Ecstasy or Xanax with beer chasers.* While substance abuse professionals have confirmed that these activities take place throughout the county, only the students from schools in the northern part of the county discussed it.

Accessing Alcohol

Kids report that *fake ID's are really easy* to obtain and use. They did not believe all the precautions taken by the DMV had hampered their efforts to alter or create fake ID's. In fact, because *bad ID's pass easily,* the underage purchase of alcohol is much *easier than parents think.* If an underage buyer does not have false identification, they can still purchase alcohol as long as they *know exactly where to go.*

If teens aren't able to go buy it themselves, having *friends that are old enough* and *older siblings* who are willing to buy are very effective ways to obtain alcohol. Because drinking is a regular occurrence for many of the teens, they have cultivated the means to manipulate others by making sure that *you have people that owe you favors* at all times. Others will take the already illegal act of possessing alcohol a step further and *steal it from others.* They also practice *shoulder taps.* The teen hovers around the outside of a convenience store, grocery store, etc. and watches for someone they think will help. When they find someone, they ask the stranger going into a store to purchase alcohol, give them a few dollars for their

trouble and the stranger gives the alcohol back to the teen once they have exited the store.

Purchasing alcohol themselves is possible and having older friends and siblings is helpful, but teens still say that there is no place like home to get alcohol. Sometimes they *sneak it from the house* and take it to a party, other times they will simply *take parents' stash (good stuff)*. It was very common to practice tactics such as *draining vodka bottle and filling with water* to get by their parents. After all, *getting alcohol is easier than parents think. We know exactly where to go.*

V. *Teens Speak*: Advice for Parents

Although many of the comments about parenting given by teens mirrored what experts recommend, this is not true in every case. It is important to note that these comments in this section came from *teens*, not experts. Some of the discussion involves understanding how kids behave versus what parents remember from their teen years. Other statements come from teens' personal experiences. There are teen observations on parenting sprinkled throughout this report but the following summary highlights three key areas, communication, the parent/child relationship and the teen social life.

Social Life

The biggest lesson that parents can take away from these nuggets of advice is for parents to be adults and intervene in their child's lives. They must ask their child a lot of questions about a lot of people. *We want parents to know (their) child's friends and (their) child's friend's parents.* They shared this was important because of the practice of getting teens to lie for each other and the parents never questioning the stories. No matter how old a teenager gets, parents must *keep talking and asking about your kid's friends—because friends change.*

It is important for parents to be aware of how teens socialize today. There are challenges arising from new technology, like text messaging and the internet, but there are also the challenges of looking at the world from a different generation. Teens shared a simple strategy for parents to determine if their child is going to a party that will include alcohol. Parents should know that *if your child is at an age when they wouldn't be having a sleepover and they say they are going to a sleepover, they aren't. They are going to a party.* Teens admitted that *nothing a parent would want to happen at parties does* and that if they wanted to keep their child safe they should *make your kids come home at night and stay away from parties.*



Teens believed that keeping kids busy was a key to keeping them out of trouble. *Get your child involved in something—free time is when trouble starts.* In the Surgeon General's 2007 Call to Action to Prevent Underage Drinking, a key community recommendation for preventing underage drinking is to, "Provide youth with opportunities to express their interests, explore their talents, pursue their passions, achieve success, commit themselves to positive endeavors, and earn status among their peers without having to use alcohol". When children receive self-fulfillment and status from peers through their participation in alcohol-free

activities, they are more likely to abstain from alcohol use.

Communication

Parents are often surprised to learn that their teenager wants good communication with them and these teens were no exception. Teens who felt they had good communication with their parents wanted other parents to realize that *it is inevitable that kids will become distant with their parents* and that all teens will go through this phase. They said that it was up to the parent to lay the groundwork for good communication long before the challenging middle and high school years arrive. According to teens, the groundwork or foundation is as simple as, *If you are regularly asking about their daily life, it will be easier when something really big comes up.* The teens suggested just asking them simple questions everyday so that they know *you are always ready to talk when they need you most.*

Parent/Child Relationship

As the discussions went on, it became evident that parents were the topic most discussed by the teens. The teens had a lot to say about their relationships with their parents but in the end, it came down to just a few core concepts. Some adults may be surprised to learn that teens wanted restrictions and boundaries. The teens' recommendation was to *start at an early age with boundaries* and continue to follow through with consequences as they mature. Balance was important to the teens as they wanted to see the consequences equally applied and parents not be too strict or too lenient. Teens remarked how important it was for them to know that their parents supported them during good and bad times. The teens believed that knowing that their parent was a constant and supportive force in their lives was key to their success. As one student noted, *good or bad, my parents have my back. They cheer me when I do good and punish me when I do bad.*

A common question is about the amount of influence parents have on their child's lives. According to the teens the strength of a parents' influence was not whether the relationship was friendly or strict but instead whether it *was based on trust.* Both teens who drink alcohol and those who abstained believed that a

After much discussion, a definition of respect was requested and a perfect answer was given by a 17 year old senior, "Respect? Respect means you care."

relationship where the teen *values parents' opinion and don't want to disappoint them* was the most powerful factor in determining a parent's influence on their children. The teens were quick to point out that to have influence, it was all about mutual trust and respect. They

also noted that if there are *parents who are strict, kids (will) rebel somehow*. When asked about why being strict is bad, they clarified that *being strict without trust breeds rebellion*. Strict authority and discipline without trust may breed rebellion, but teens also said that being too lenient didn't help either. After all, *while you can't have two strict parents, two friends won't work either*.

The most frequently discussed concept at every focus group was respect. Having an *equal level of respect* for each other was key as evidenced by the statement, *parents who respect kids get kids who respect parents*. The recommendation was given for parents to *tell them (their children) consequences (of all types) and follow through*. They didn't want parents to *beat around the bush about* sensitive issues. Parents need to *be involved* and *communicate* their concerns regarding alcohol. After much discussion about respect, a definition of respect was requested and a simple answer was given, *respect means you care*.

VI. Community Recommendations

Underage drinking can only be reduced when multiple community sectors come together and recognize the need for a solution to this epidemic. This coming together of multiple sectors is what makes a coalition and it is through that coalition that strategies can be developed which have communitywide support (Ellis). These strategies are often called environmental strategies because they are intended to change the factors in the environment which are influencing underage drinking behavior. Environmental strategies targeting underage drinking are divided into four categories: Community Norms; Policy and Enforcement; Media Messages; and Access and Availability. If strategies are implemented that address these four areas, St. Johns County will begin to move closer to a safer and healthier community for all.

Community Norms

Community norms are those community conditions and unwritten rules which either encourage or discourage underage drinking. They are often the most difficult to reshape and have the greatest impact. A common community norm is the belief that rites of passage should be celebrated with alcohol and because high school graduation is a rite of passage, alcohol should be served during the post-ceremony celebration. Not all parents feel that way however. In the 2006 Community Alcohol Survey, the majority of parents polled stated that they did not support underage drinking (Health Tech Consultants). Parents are constantly asking the coalition what they can do to help change the environment which encourages underage drinking.

In this tourism-driven, beach community, it is normal for the residents to take a more laid back approach to daily life than many inland communities. Open air bars and restaurants line the waterfront and there is no shortage of off-site alcohol retailers (convenience and package stores) as examples of this community's comfort with alcohol's infusion into daily life. A great example is the bumper sticker which brags about the amount of alcohol consumed here: *St. Augustine: A quaint little drinking village with a fishing problem*. While these characteristics may enhance the adult vacationer's experience, they also send a clear message to resident and vacationing youth that alcohol is everywhere and it is an acceptable part of everyday life, including those underage.

Recommendations

1. Parents promote and host alcohol-free parties for their children.
2. Parents investigate whether alcohol will be served at a party their child is attending and if so, they do not allow their child to attend thereby setting the example that this practice is unacceptable.
3. Community organizations provide and promote alcohol-free activities for teens,

especially during peak use times such as school vacations and the summer.

4. Community leaders examine public celebrations where alcohol is served to determine if its presence is appropriate for the intended audience and if so, ensure that it is not the focal point of the event.

Policy and Enforcement

Policy refers to rules and laws which exist in the public (school districts, cities, counties, states) and private sectors (businesses and social clubs), and their enforcement by those in positions of authority. Strong policies and laws which demonstrate the public and private sectors' willingness to formally address underage drinking are crucial to reducing underage drinking. Raising awareness of the problem is important but without the policies and laws to formalize and enforce desired results, no change can occur. An example of a formal policy regarding alcohol consumption and underage drinking is one adopted by Flagler College. It states in part:

Policies such as this support existing laws by emphasizing the serious and irreversible, disciplinary consequences which can result from breaking a state law such as underage drinking.

The use or possession of alcoholic beverages on the campus by students or their guests is prohibited and is grounds for suspension from the College. Students are expected to comply with municipal, state and federal laws pertaining to the possession and use of alcoholic beverages off campus. Incidents of intoxication and/or misconduct involving the consumption of alcoholic beverages are subject to College disciplinary action regardless of the location of such incidents.

The enforcement of underage drinking reduction policies is the responsibility of those in charge of the domain they exist in. While law enforcement is responsible for the enforcement of ordinances and statutes, they also assist in the enforcement of policies which add but do not taken away from the law. In the state of Florida it is illegal for a person under the age of 21 to possess alcohol, but it is not illegal for them to be under the influence. However, the St. Johns County School District has put a policy in place regarding "a student whose faculties are comprised" or is intoxicated. This policy enhances the current statute while fostering a culture of intolerance for underage drinking and a willingness to address it as is evidenced by the multi-sector application of this policy. Included in this process are parents, law enforcement, substance abuse treatment providers, and school administrators who together can comprehensively address all issues related to the infraction.

Parties where alcohol is consumed by underage youth present law

enforcement with a unique set of challenges (Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation). As part of an evolving set of strategies to thoughtfully enforce underage drinking statutes, underage drinking details or party patrols have begun to take place on peak party weekends. The patrols disperse the parties and administer the appropriate legal actions against the teens and adults involved.

Recommendations

1. Parents support of the authority responsible for applying the appropriate consequences to the youth. This may include law enforcement, school, employer, coaches or any other authority figure who is involved in the situation. Keep an open mind to both sides of the story before assuming that your child would never violate a policy or law.
2. Residents should alert local law enforcement of suspected teen parties in their neighborhoods, whether they personally know of alcohol being served or not. The party patrols can investigate and take any actions needed to end the party and ensure everyone's safety in the long-run.
3. Adults who learn of parties from teens, whether first or secondhand, should be reported to local law enforcement or a Youth Resource Deputy.
4. Implementation of an anonymous underage party hotline for the public can report any tips or concerns about upcoming teen parties.
5. The judiciary must be willing to give the offending underage drinker stronger consequences such as a mandatory alcohol education program that includes the parent and teen.

Media Messages

Today's marketing is more invasive and subliminal than ever and many parents have not been able to easily keep up with the media messages bombarding their children. In the United States Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General's Report on Alcohol Advertising's Effect on Youth, The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) recognized the influence advertising can have on youth: "The impact of advertising on radio and television audiences, particularly kids, cannot be overstated. Clever jingles, flashy lights, fast talking, and quick pacing, all contribute to the message of commercials." (United States Health and Human Services)

Marketers today are using any medium available to reach their intended audience and alcohol is no exception. Alcohol advertising can be found on cell phone downloads, movie trailers, clothing, drinking games, sports venues, outdoor advertising, storefronts, magazines, and more. According to the Center for Alcohol Marketing to Youth (CAMY), in radio alone, more than a third (35.6%) of advertising placements were on programming that youth were more likely to hear on a per

capita basis than adults. As children transition from pre-teens to teens, it can become increasingly difficult for parents to monitor and censor this type of advertising but it is not impossible to counteract marketers' intentions.

Recommendations

1. Parents should not allow their children to purchase or wear clothing with alcohol logos. By allowing them to do so, you are also condoning their consumption of the product whose name is on their chest.
2. Parents can use the sighting of an alcohol billboard or television ad as a starting point for discussing underage drinking. The child will have the opportunity to share their viewpoint thus giving the parent a chance to redirect them with the facts about underage drinking.
3. Listen to their music, watch their favorite television shows and read their magazines. All these forms of media will give parents a glimpse into alcohol's intrusion into their child's life and help them become savvy about trends surrounding the appeal of underage alcohol use.
4. Parents should not purchase drinking games for their children. These commercialized versions of college drinking games like beer pong and quarters can now be purchased at national retail outlets. One version of beer pong even includes a miniature ping-pong table. These games promote drinking as sport and ignore the inherent dangers in doing so.

Access and Availability

Reducing adolescents' access to alcohol by reducing its availability is the responsibility of the community. Because teens obtain their alcohol through a variety of means, focusing on only one is not sufficient. While collaboration is key to all the environmental strategies, this area requires the most comprehensive collaboration by far. When these strategies are simultaneously implemented, not only will teen access to alcohol decrease but the apathy for underage drinking will also shift.

Recommendations

1. Alcohol retailers and restaurants should train employees on underage drinking laws and their responsibilities under the outlet's state liquor license (Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation). The employees should also be made aware of the consequences they can suffer individually for non-compliance. Businesses are responsible for reminding patrons of the legal drinking age.
2. The number of collaborative compliance checks with Alcoholic Beverage and Tobacco (ABT) Enforcement and local law enforcement increases so that alcohol

outlets have evidence that meaningful penalties exist for noncompliance.

3. Parents cannot willingly provide alcohol to their children. Not only is this practice illegal, but is dangerous and unhealthy (White).
4. If there is alcohol in the home, parents must monitor the levels to ensure teens are not secretly consuming or removing it from the home.

Summary

St. Johns County is a desirable place to live as evidenced by its dramatic growth. This growth can have some drawbacks, one of which is a disconnected feeling noted by some newer residents, especially youth. One of the factors leading to substance abuse is a lack of connection to the community. If we don't address this unintended consequence of growth, underage drinking can in turn lead to other communitywide consequences which impact every resident. Where underage drinking is high, so is the use of illegal drugs. Underage drinking also impacts juvenile property crimes, which are higher than average, along with a host of other social ills.

Only when members of law enforcement, parents, the school district, the faith community, civic organizations, elected officials, youth serving organizations, substance abuse treatment providers, healthcare professionals, members of the media, and youth work together to implement these recommendations can underage drinking be reduced in St. Johns County, making it a safe and healthy place for all residents, young and old.

Conclusion

This assessment initiative succeeded in its purpose of discovering the 'why?' behind the 'how many?'. The focus group format allowed teens to speak freely about alcohol use among themselves and their peers. The teens addressed the five areas which are the most crucial to understanding underage drinking: outside influences; personal beliefs; drinking behavior; sources and preferences; and their advice for parents. However, upon completion of this report some shortcomings were uncovered.

Because of the limited demographic of students, key groups were not well represented. Characteristics such as race, income, academic achievement and family structure were not part of the participant selection process. Future focus groups should be conducted which account for these characteristics to better ensure a more demographically balanced sample.

Another concern is the high schools chosen. Two high schools located in St. Johns County were not included in the study. Neither the private St. Joseph's Academy nor the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind were asked to participate. Because each of these groups have some characteristics that make them unique, their input is critical to gaining a better understanding of this community. They will both be invited to participate in future assessments.

Despite these shortcomings, the anecdotal data gathered is already being used by PACT, the St. Johns County School District-Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, along with other Coalition members to have thoughtful discussions while developing strategies to decrease underage drinking. This report should also serve as a community resource for leaders to begin examining improvements that they can champion and a resource for educators and parents to begin the discussion of underage drinking with children.

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