



LAKE COUNTY NARCOTICS AGENCY

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P.L.U.S.² Parent's Guide Lesson 2 Dangers of Underage Alcohol Use

This week's lesson engages the students in conversation about the *Dangers of Underage Alcohol Use*. These dangers are far beyond simply drinking and driving. Nationally, 30% of 7th graders in the United States have experimented with alcohol *without their parent's knowledge or permission*. That number goes to 49% in 8th grade and 71% by 9th grade. And if we look at adult binge drinkers, 35% began drinking under the age of 18 (*Binge drinking is defined as at least 5 drinks on any one occasion*). What does our society believe about alcohol? Can we have a celebration without alcohol? Can we go to a party, reception, recognition, sporting event, theater production, orchestra or recital, camping trip, picnic, boating/fishing, skiing, a quiet evening alone, a motorcycle/car rally, a without alcohol being present? How do our youth see alcohol? Alcohol has become a part of just about everything we do. Yet we expect youth to abstain or we expect them to “*use alcohol responsibly*” when they participate in all of those above-mentioned events. Can alcohol be used responsibly under the legal age of 21?

Did you know that youth who begin drinking under the age of 15 are six times more likely to develop a drinking problem as an adult who waits to the age of 21 to begin using alcohol? And then there is the alcohol connection to the use of tobacco and marijuana. Of those who have never tried drinking, only 2% become smokers and 1% become marijuana users. Of teens who have smoked, 60% are current drinkers, 37% are binge drinkers, and 40% are marijuana users. If we compare this to teens who haven't smoked, 25% are current drinkers, 8% are binge drinkers, and 5% are marijuana users.

What about the drinking and driving issue? Is it an issue? No question about that. Thirty-five (35%) to 40% of underage driving related deaths involve alcohol. There is nothing safe about mixing any amount of alcohol with driving, but with youth it's even worse. Take into account that there is little to no driving experience attained for those underage. This is why insurance is so high for youth...the insurance companies know that youth are going to have more accidents because they are not as prepared to avoid them because they simply don't have the experience. Let's add to this scenario the fact that youth don't have a *real* concept that they could actually die or be severely injured. The adolescent brain is not fully developed until a person reaches their mid-20s. Until that time, the frontal lobe continues to develop - this is the part of the brain responsible for judging risk and making decisions. As a result of this limited brain development, as well as limited life experience, the concept of “risk” is very, very different than it is for adults. Youth tend to drive too fast because they truly don't see the risk and they don't have the driving experience to judge how to control a car at high speeds. So let's add a drug that slows ones reaction time, confuses the brain, and impairs judgment with a teen behind the wheel. That's a recipe for disaster and death. Kids can recite back to you very efficiently all the reasons for not drinking and driving....yet they still do it.

Many adults think that the way to keep our kids safe with alcohol is to make sure we take the car keys when they go to a party to drink, or make sure they have a designated driver if they are going out to drink. That way we are making sure no ill effects will befall our kids...right? Did you know that 90% of *date rapes* occur when one or both parties are under the influence of alcohol? What about *unanticipated teen pregnancies*...alcohol accounts for 70% of these. And then 80% of *violence on college campuses* (*not*

including date rape) is alcohol related. And to top off the list 50% of all adolescent drowning accidents are the result of alcohol consumption. According to the Drug Abuse Warning Network, 42% of drug-related Emergency Department visits for patients aged 12-20 involved alcohol, and 68% of these visits were for alcohol only (2004).

What about the concept of "know your limit"? How does one learn their limit? Think about it...you learn your limit with alcohol by going past it. Then the expectation is "*you won't do that again.*" That just doesn't work with youth. Drinking becomes a competition among youth...it becomes about bragging rights. The adult user doesn't go into an evening with alcohol thinking that they will *use too much*. Youth on the other hand go in knowing they will get sick, throw up, and then drink some more. The goal for most youth who use alcohol is "to get drunk". So that leads us to the myth that what we need to do is teach our youth to drink responsibly. Let's look at other countries that allow youth to drink at much younger ages than 21. Do these countries have kids with drinking problems? Of the 35 countries surveyed around the world for Heavy Drinking in the Past 30 Days, 12th grade alcohol use in the United States ranks 34th at 22%. Almost the lowest of all the countries (*only beaten by Turkey (12%)!*) Denmark ranks the highest at 60% followed by the Netherlands 58%, Germany and Ireland at 57%, United Kingdom at 54%.

As a culture we have sent a very clear message to our youth ".....alcohol is okay, just know when to say no." It's no wonder that some adults allow youth to drink in their home as long as they (the youth) check their keys at the door. "I mean....we can't stop them anyway....", "let's at least keep them safe while they drink....", "how can I tell them 'no' when I drink?" We don't want to be hypocritical, do we? But what is the message we send at that point... "laws are made to be broken", "just don't get caught", "....drinking is only bad IF you drive", "...learn how to control your use of a dangerous drug". In other words, *Youth interpretation*: "I can control my use of all drugs", "it's okay to break the law *a little bit*", "alcohol only hurts you if you crash." Maybe we need to take our understanding of underage alcohol use to another level. In Ohio suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for those under 25 years of age and homicide is the 3rd. Alcohol use is directly related to 60% of the suicides by youth under 18. What about the possible legal problems, declining school performance, or likelihood of continued drug/alcohol use that may be associated with underage alcohol use? Our society needs to look at this drug alcohol in a very different way if we want to protect our youth. Eighty-three percent of youth report that parents are the leading influence in their decision to not to drink alcohol. (Source: The Century Council, February 2012) Parents need to talk to their children and know that their opinions do matter when it comes to our youth and their choices about alcohol!

Student/Parent Homework this week - *Effects of Tobacco and Inhalants*:

The students are to find general information about the dangers of tobacco and inhalant use which they will use during a *Jeopardy game* presented during class. The categories being used will be: "Just the Facts" and "50/50". If your child has access to the Internet here are some web sites that can be helpful: theantidrug.com; kidshealth.org; jointogether.org; thetruth.com; ohiolung.org; nida.nih.gov; abovetheinfluence.com; inhalants.org. As your child looks for information to use during the jeopardy game, I am sure they will gather some great information way beyond the scope of what will be needed. That will be a good thing. The more information our kids have the better chance they will have in making good, positive decisions.

The students have been asked to begin to collect clippings, printed statements, and general information, etc. on *the Effects of Alcohol or Tobacco*. These clippings will be used in a later class to prepare posters to display around the school.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Officer Willis at the
Lake County Narcotics Agency, phone 440-350-3302.