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Family Physicians Encourage Communication With Young Adults About Drinking

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)— With prom season just around the corner, it is more important than ever to talk to young adults about alcohol consumption.

As much as parents may not like to think about it, the truth is that many kids and teens try alcohol during their high school and college years, long before it is legal for them to drink it. Research has shown that nearly 80 percent of high school kids have tried alcohol.

“We (family physicians) have first-hand knowledge of the statistics that teenage drinking is one of the leading causes of death of our teens,” said Donald Mack, M.D., a family physician in Columbus, Ohio.

Teenage years are a time of learning and discovery, so it is important for parents to encourage their teens to ask questions, even ones that might be hard to answer. Keeping communication open and expectations reasonable will help to increase the chances that they will say “no” when they are faced with a situation involving alcohol.

However, it can be challenging for parents to teach their teens about the effects of alcohol because many teens have an attitude of being invincible. Seeking help from a family physician and by parents being positive role models themselves is the answer; it is not an impossible task.

According to Mack, there is a campaign in Ohio called “Those Who Host Lose the Most” that has proven to decrease teen access to alcohol by stopping parents from supplying alcohol at parties and celebrations.

“We (adults) do not need to have alcohol to celebrate, and we can be a role model for our teens that alcohol does not have to be at adult functions.”

Mack advises teens to avoid alcohol completely, “even if they manage to be safe, many teens know of friends that have lost their driver’s license due to underage drinking. This will limit their ability to get a job or get to extracurricular activities. Most teens in the end will value their independence over drinking with their friends.”

The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,000 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.



FACT SHEET

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General Tips

Fortunately, parents can do much to protect their teens from using and abusing alcohol:

- Be a good role model. Consider how your use of alcohol or medications may influence your teens. Consider offering only nonalcoholic beverages at parties and other social events to show your teens that you do not need to drink to have fun.
- Educate yourself about alcohol so you can be a better teacher. Read and collect information that you can share with teens and other parents.
- Try to be conscious of how you can help build your teen's self-esteem. For example, they are more likely to feel good about themselves if you emphasize their strengths and positively reinforce healthy behaviors.
- Teach teens to manage stress in healthy ways, such as by seeking help from a trusted adult or engaging in a favorite activity.

Recognizing the Signs

Despite your efforts, your teen may still use — and abuse — alcohol. How can you tell? Here are some common warning signs:

- The odor of alcohol
- Sudden change in mood or attitude
- Change in attendance or performance at school
- Loss of interest in school, sports or other activities
- Discipline problems at school
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Secrecy
- Association with a new group of friends and reluctance to introduce them to you
- Alcohol disappearing from your home
- Depression and developmental difficulties

Sources: <http://drugfreeactionalliance.org/documents/LawKnowledge.pdf>
www.familydoctor.org