

*And What Would You Do??*

Underage Drinking is extremely dangerous and sometimes fatal to a young person and yet we see it happening every day. We run prevention programs, and still there are some adults out there who feel its okay for young people to drink. Some even provide the alcohol saying, "I'd rather they drink at home where I can take their keys." Well guess what, driving is not the only danger in allowing underage drinking. *The national Household Survey on Drug Abuse (May 2003) reported that, "Adolescence and young adulthood are times of transition both physically and socially, and many youthful behaviors can have far-reaching consequences. Regular, excessive alcohol use in adolescence can result in changes in brain functioning and cognitive impairment. Underage drinkers who drive after drinking are at greater risk of fatal crashes than older drinkers because of their lack of driving experience and over-confidence. Among college students, about one in four reported academic problems related to their alcohol use, and excessive alcohol use can result in death or injury, sexual assault or engaging in unprotected sex, vandalism or property damage."* In addition, a study from the Center of Substance Abuse Prevention and Mental Health Services suggests that boys who drink are prone to fighting and sexual aggression (15.6% engaged in alcohol-related physical fighting) and 39% say it is acceptable for a boy to force sex with a girl who is drunk or high. While 37% of girls reported attempting suicide. Our young people deserve better !!

Community members were asked, "What would you do if you were at a gathering and young people were drinking?" The responses follow:

**Kathy, adult:** "I don't serve alcohol to underage people in our home. I have extended family members who have served underaged people at parties. I don't go to their parties anymore."

**Dallas, adult:** "I would contact the parents if at all possible and request that they come pick-up their child now and inform them that they were drinking. If I had no other options, I would likely call the local police if I did not know how to reach the parents. I would do all in my power to keep my teenager I observed drinking from driving away."

**Marcia, adult:** "I would first directly confront the underage individuals and then speak to any responsible persons in the house. I would share my disappointment with both parties and leave the home. It would be very difficult for me to stay aware of the ongoing situation."

**Kathy, adult:** "I am not present when underage drinking takes place. I don't allow it in my home and certainly wouldn't be the purchaser of alcohol for someone under the age of 21. However, I have been present when beer is being purchased by U.B. students. Recently I was grocery shopping at the Wegman on Alberta Drive. The store was full of U.B. students coming back from break and loading up on snacks. One group of guys had a cart with frozen pizza, frozen waffles, bread, bananas, nacho chips and a case of beer. I decided to check out behind them and observe how they were proofed. I was glad to see the clerk checking the driver's licenses to make sure the purchasers were all of legal age. However, if the clerk did not do this I would have said something to him and then reported the situation to the store manager."

**Sally, adult:** "I have had the unfortunate experience of being present at a party where underage drinking was going on and the host, an adults, was taking keys from the young drivers. I voiced my concern to the host and left the party immediately. I followed up by sending a weekly message to the host describing different consequences associated with underage drinking. He soon got my point and called to say he has now been educated and will never serve minors again."

**Pat, adult:** "I believe I would leave the affair. This would not be difficult; my close friends who I truly care about would not serve alcohol to underage youth. It would be easy to leave acquaintances who might serve alcohol to underage youth."

**Jillian, age 18:** "If I were in a situation where underage people were drinking, I would certainly not take part in the drinking with them. I have enough confidence in myself to choose not to drink, because I know that it just gives everyone else a false impression of who you really are. I want to be who I am, and I want to always be in control of my actions and words."

The Search Institute survey conducted in 2003 indicated that a full 30% of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders never had alcohol to drink. 24% of this same age group of students engaged in binge drinking (5 drinks in a row for males and 4 for females) during the 2 weeks prior to the survey. 53% of this group reported attending one or more parties in the last year “where other kids your age were drinking. And, 14% reported having driven or ridden with a drinking driver three or more times in the last 12 months. More encouraging is that 89% of students reported that their parents would be very to extremely upset if they came home from a party and their parents found out that they had been dinking. When parents clearly state their rules and expectations, young people are less likely to become involved with substances. Frequent discussion with your child is another way to help them deal with the underage drinking / drugging scene.

Detective Sergeant Mike Torrillo of the Amherst Police Department, has this advice for parents - “If you discover youth drinking at someone’s home, seek out the homeowner and let them know how inappropriate this activity is and ask them to stop it immediately. If the homeowner is the source of the alcohol, again tell them how inappropriate it is and let them know that if it continues you will have no recourse but to call the police. In either case, the parents of the young people should be called and asked to pick up their child.”

All of the studies tell us that a parent is the more important person in a child’s life. Whether you realize it or not, children do care about what you tell them. They do care about the value that you teach them. And they do not want to disappoint you. Remember, an ongoing conversation (including your families rules, expectations and consequences) with you child is so important in your child’s behavior decisions. For information on starting that discussion, you can contact the Erie County Council at 839-1157 or log onto [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com).

*A recent discussion with high school students indicated that stress is the reason young people do alcohol and other drugs. The March HC/HY column will seek to find comments from adults and youth in the community regarding “stress” in a young persons’ life. Do you know what is causing it? Do you have any suggestions on how to deal with it? If so, please drop a line to Sally Yageric, c/o ECCPASA 4255 Harlem Road, Amherst, NY 14226. The Healthy Community\*Healthy Youth column is presented as a forum for family discussion. Your comments and suggestions are welcome. If you have an idea for a topic, please let us hear from you.*

*Send a note to the Amherst Task Force, 4255 Harlem Road, Amherst, NY 14226 or e-mail [Sally@eccpasa.info](mailto:Sally@eccpasa.info).*