



Parents Are Heroes

A Newsletter of the **Making Sobriety Attractive** (MSA) Program,
a SAMHSA-funded Drug-Free Communities Project for Kent County,

“90% of teens who believe their parents disapprove, do not drink alcohol”

Presented by ALERTLabs.ORG of Michigan

Supported by the Kent County Prevention Coalition and Mothers Against Drug Driving

December Edition 2009

In this issue:

- **Correcting Misperceptions: Most Teens Do NOT Drink, and Most Adults do NOT Drink Much**
- **Alcohol Harms Teens and Heavy Drinking Harms Adults**

To see previous Parent Newsletters, click below
alertlabs.org/newsletter.php

NEW RESOURCE FOR PARENTS OF ADDICTED CHILDREN: Parent AI Anon Meeting, Monday at 7:30 p.m. Mayflower Church (call: 361-5227)

A Holiday Warning: Caffeinated Alcohol Drinks are Dangerous for Adults as well as Kids. www.usnews.com/health/blogs/on-parenting/2009/11/13/safety-of-caffeinated-alcohol-drinks-is-under-federal-spotlight.html

GOOD NEWS: Most teens don't drink, **BAD NEWS:** but those who do, average more than 4 drinks per occasion.
www.alertlabs.org/documents

Studies show that

Two Major *Misperceptions* Make it Difficult to Prevent or Reduce Underage Drinking: #1 Everybody Drinks (a Lot), #2 Drinking is Harmless... But We Can Change That By Sharing the Truth

#1a. Most teenagers do NOT drink. Parents who have been following the Making Sobriety Attractive (MSA) project in their children's schools over the past four years KNOW that most teenagers do NOT drink. In fact, it is the case that the 2006 survey showed that **62%** of students in these high school did not use alcohol in the past 30 days. The 2009 survey showed an increase in abstention, that **72% did not drink last year.** But most parents and teens do NOT know that **not drinking is the norm.** **WE NEED TO TELL EVERYONE THE TRUTH.**

#1b. Most adults do NOT drink much or often. The national research on who drinks, how much, etc. among American adults reveals that last year **40% of our fellow citizens did NOT drink in the past 30 days, not even once.** **AND 35% of adults drank lightly or moderately.** In brief, **75% of Americans never drink daily and seldom feel the need for alcohol.** Only around 25% of Americans (mostly between the ages of 18 and 25) ever have more than seven drinks (women) or 14 drinks (men) in a week, and most of those never get “drunk.” Those who do get drunk, have Substance Use Disorders and need professional help (see www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/alcohol.htm; www.alertlabs.org/programs.php?program_id=4). **WE NEED TO TELL EVERYONE THE TRUTH.**

But advertisers show us through magazine ads and 30-second commercials that “everybody drinks,” that all celebrations (like Thanksgiving and Christmas), or even ordinary family events such as watching football on TV, *require* alcohol. It is not true, does anyone in the movies ever watch football without drinking? **WE NEED TO TELL EVERYONE THE TRUTH – especially our children.**

The simple truth is that ADVERTISING LIES (by implication if not in fact). The only people who NEED to drink, ever, are those addicted to alcohol.

The problem is not just alcohol advertising, though teens are exposed to much more of it than are adults. The misperceptions about what is normal in terms of alcohol use are widespread. MSA researchers have surveyed both students and parents about their perceptions of each other and about their own use and attitudes toward alcohol and other drugs. It is obvious from the size of the misperceptions reported that parents and teenage students in general are wildly inaccurate in their estimates of each others' use of alcohol and other drugs.

alcohol is a factor in 66% of student suicides and 60% of all sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV.

www.jointogether.org/sa/issues/hot_issues/binge/more/.

Women who consumed alcohol two or more times a day had death rates seven times higher than women who drank one or two drinks a week. www.jointogether.org/news/research/summaries/2004/female-excessive-drinkers-at.htm

Dating Violence, Peer Violence, Bullying, and Suicidal Behaviors are all linked and all are tied to alcohol use among students in grades 7, 9, and 11.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/07493797>

The ALERT Labs

Group: *Project Director, Nancy L. Harper, Ph.D., Dean of Social Sciences and Professor of Communication (ret.), Executive Director, ALERT Labs Consulting; Co-Director, Coordinator, and Evaluator, Donald (Tex) Bryant, M.S. & M.Ed., Bryant Healthcare Services, STARR Facilitator for screening and intervention, Geoffrey L. Stevens, LMSW, Alternative Behavioral Health Services; Theatre Coordinator, Carla Jackson, Certified in Secondary Education, Media Instruction and Peer Listening, Creative Director Shannon Welsh, Welsh Advertising.*
www.alertlabs.org
Contact : info@alertlabs.org

The results reveal that Parents consistently *underestimate* their own children's alcohol use, and *overestimate* drinking by children in general:

- Parents *perceive that* students in general drink **almost 7 times more often than is true**,
- But they think their own child is different, that he/she **does not drink (though more than 1/4 of students do drink)**;
- Similarly, **students think parents drink nearly 3 times more often than is true** (and what students *believe about their parents* is more important in predicting students' drinking than is *the truth*).
- The same is true of students' perceptions of other students' drinking; **94% believe that virtually ALL of their peers drink and that 91% use marijuana**. Each individual student seems to feel like the ONLY high school student that abstains.

These misperceptions are important because they lead to a belief that there is a lot of "peer pressure" to drink, which is not true. We call it **Phantom Peer Pressure**. This perceived pressure leads people to believe that they need to "drink up to the norm," though the true norm is not drinking (teens) or drinking moderately and only occasionally (adults). **WE NEED TO TELL EVERYONE THE TRUTH and Banish the Phantoms!**

#2a. Drinking causes great harm to teenagers. MSA research is consistent with national research which finds that teenage drinkers suffer significant brain damage resulting in *legal, social and academic problems, and NEVER catch up with their peers who did not drink as teens* (American Medical Association : www.ama-assn.org/ama/no-index/about-ama/13555.shtml). See selected consequences below:

Consequences Reported by Teens Who Have 4+ Drinks Per Occasion*

Drove OR rode with Driver under the influence	85%
Had unwanted sex or sexual contact	56%
Got into a fight or argument	32%
Academic Problems: Missed School	49%
Turned work in late, missed test, did not study	43%
Performed poorly on a test or project	30%

* Note: 4 drinks for teens = 8 for adults.

#2b. Drinking causes great harm to adults. Adults' consequences are similar to teenagers, but also include significant health problems, e.g., stroke, high blood pressure (at two drinks per day), coronary heart disease, throat, esophageal, stomach, liver, rectum, pancreatic and colon cancer, etc. **Even one drink per day increases women's chances of developing breast cancer. Use of alcohol has been directly tied to childhood obesity.** Alcohol is the **third leading cause of death.** *Journal of the American Medical Association, 2001; Journal of Studies on Alcohol, July 2004; "Did You Know... Health"* www.alertlabs.org/articles.php?category_id=3. **WE NEED TO TELL EVERYONE THE TRUTH--especially our children** (see www.talksooner.org).



Phantom Peer Pressure School Poster

Percent

85%
56%
32%
49%
43%
30%