



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 www.ALERTLabs.org of Michigan

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In this issue:

- **Most Americans have Struggled with Addiction: 63% of Families and 30% of Individuals**
- **Addiction Starts in Adolescence and is an Inherited Brain Disease – it is Chronic and Fatal, but with Abstinence it goes into Remission**

Previous Parent Newsletters at alertlabs.org/newsletter.php

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

Just ONE QUESTION can help a doctor or parent to identify dangerous drinking: “How many times in the past year have you had X

About 1/3 of Americans Have Had Alcohol Problems in their Lives; Nearly 2/3 of Families Have Struggled with Someone’s Addiction¹ to Alcohol

The most devastating outcome of underage alcohol and other drug use is Addiction. ADDICTION IS A GENETICALLY TRANSMITTED BRAIN DISEASE characterized by compulsive use of mind-altering drugs such as alcohol, and is usually initiated during adolescence, when the brain is in the process of maturing.²

Individuals who have inherited the predisposition for the disease will not experience actual addiction until they begin to use drugs that can activate the predisposition (usually by smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol as teenagers). Thus, **addiction can be prevented if those at risk abstain from any and all mind-altering drugs**, including addictive prescription drugs for sleep enhancement, pain relief, anxiety or depression -- all of which are conditions that are often *caused by*, and will *worsen* with, the use of alcohol*. Some common drugs to avoid are Vicodin, Oxycontin, Valium, Ambien, Xanax and certain of the drugs prescribed for attention deficit disorders. (Be especially careful with the latter because persons with ADD or ADHD are nearly all predisposed to addiction.)

*Unfortunately, teens may believe that drinking or other drug use “medicates” anxiety, etc. However, drinking only *numbs* the emotions associated with the problem and makes us forget them temporarily. We need to make sure teenagers understand this fact: The problem will still be there in the morning.

Uncontrolled environmental factors may speed or delay the onset of AOD use, e.g., the influence of relevant adults such as parents, teachers, and religious leaders as well as exposure to pervasive alcohol advertising.

Adults who promote a norm of abstinence for young people, and of moderation for themselves and other adults, have a significant impact on teenagers' decisions to use or not use

¹ See: Addiction: “**Drugs, Brains, and Behavior - The Science of Addiction**” at <http://www.drugabuse.gov/scienceofaddiction/> for more information. See also: **Definitions: Dangerous Drinking vs. Social Drinking** at www.alertlabs.org/articles.article.php?_id=1 and **Symptoms of Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Disorders** at www.alertlabs.org/articles.php?article_id=11; For Parents: <http://www.thepowerofparents.org/high-school-parents/>; **Dealing with another’s addiction:** <http://addictions.about.com/>

² Maturation occurs for women at about age 21 and for men at about age 25. **Those who start smoking or drinking, or using other drugs prior to these ages place themselves at high risk for Substance Use Disorders (SUD's) culminating in Addiction, especially if they have a family history of AOD problems or if they have ADD/ADHD.** In fact, 50% of those who begin drinking prior to age 15 develop significant SUD's and addiction.

or more drinks in a day?" (X=1+ for teens, 4 for women, and 5 for men.) An answer of even one time indicates "unhealthy" use. See *Journ Gen Intern Med* Published online March 12, 2009.

<http://cme.medscape.com/viewarticle/589706?src=cmenews&uac=98100FT>

The largest single age group of alcohol addicts is age 18, AND 52.7% of ALL alcoholics are young adults, under age 25. They need our help to SAVE THEIR LIVES, to get into an intervention or treatment. More details available at www.alertlabs.org/blog.php

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Would You be Ashamed if Your Teenager Had a Brain Tumor? Would You Believe it was a Moral Problem/Weak Willpower? Would You Laugh and Assume it was "Just a Stage"?

If our answer to any of these questions is "NO," then we need to apply this same thinking to teenage (or adult) addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Having "addiction" is the same as having any other **brain disease**, such as a tumor. The seeds of addiction, the "predisposition," is transmitted through our genetics to our children – we cannot prevent the transmission. If your son or daughter becomes addicted, IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT.

BUT, IT WILL BE YOUR FAULT, *IF YOU DON'T INTERVENE*. If you had reason to suspect that your child had a brain tumor, you would seek immediate, professional help. It is crucial to do the same if you know your teen is using cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana or other drugs. Alcohol is twice as damaging to children and teenagers as to adults. And, most young people who use alcohol, drink heavily (high school drinkers in Kent County schools surveyed **average over 4 drinks per occasion** – enough to qualify for the label "binge drinker" and equal to 8 drinks for an adult).

Characteristics of Young People Who Become Addicted:

- Started in early teens**, between ages 10 and 15 (>50% will become addicted.)
- Have a family history** of addiction or other drug "problems" (1 in 4 children of alcohol addicts will become addicted IF THEY DRINK, smoke, or use other "habit forming" drugs). About 60% of students surveyed, have this history.
- Have co-occurring tobacco and illicit-drug use** (began smoking prior to drinking; began drinking prior to using other drugs, then moved to marijuana, etc.).
- Have ADD/ADHD**, though may not be diagnosed.
- Suffer from anxiety and depression** (as a result of alcohol and other drug use, though some may believe that they are "treating" these conditions with AOD).

Your teenager can test him/herself confidentially at

www.alertlabs.org/self_test.php More details are available at www.alertlabs.org/blog.php. See also: www.nih.gov/news/pr/jul2007/niaaa-02.htm or <http://archpsyc.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/64/7/830>.

Did You Know?

Children (and adults) in remission, or "recovery" from alcohol, marijuana, or other drug addiction are protected by the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA Title II Technical Assistance Manual).

Is Marijuana a Medicine?

Wall Street Journal, Tuesday, January 19, 2010

Long-term marijuana use can lead to physical dependence, though it is not as addictive as nicotine or alcohol. But a teenager with a predisposition will quickly be hooked. Doctors say that marijuana can benefit some patients with neuropathic pain...caused by certain types of nerve injury, and in treating nausea from chemotherapy. But [cannot benefit patients] in a range of other conditions [and] Marijuana has unpleasant... **side effects including a racing heart and short-term memory loss and, ...anxiety and psychotic experiences such as hallucinations....dizziness**, reduction in ability to concentrate. Memory loss may be permanent.

http://online.wsj.com/article_email/SB20001424052748703626604575011223512854284-1MyQjAyMTAwMDEwOTExNDkyWj.html