



youth service bureau

Underage Drinking: Myths and Facts

By: Sarah Holmboe, M.A., YSB Parent Education Coordinator

Mike Huntley, M.A., LP, YSB Youth and Family Therapist

With the growing popularity of drugs such as marijuana and e-cigarettes, underage alcohol consumption in Washington County tends to be overlooked. However, it's still very much a problem. According to 2013 Minnesota Student Survey data, 15% of 11th-grade males and 15% of 11th-grade females in Washington County reported consuming an alcoholic beverage one or two days out of the month.

Part of the solution to this problem is educating both youth and parents about the risks of underage drinking. Here are some myths some parents may believe about underage drinking, along with some facts about what's happening in Minnesota.

MYTH: I can let my child (and my child's friends) drink at home with me. It's safer for them to drink here than somewhere else.

FACT: According to the Minnesota Department of Safety, persons under the age of 21 may not possess an alcoholic beverage with the intent to consume, **UNLESS** while in the household of the person's parent or guardian, with their parent or guardian's permission, **AND** with the parent present while the alcohol is being consumed.

However, this does **NOT** mean that your child's friends are legally allowed to consume alcohol in your home, even with their parent's permission. Legally, they are only allowed to consume alcohol with their parents in their own home.

In addition, keep in mind that "Adults who provide alcohol to minors can be held responsible and suffer serious criminal, legal and financial consequences, including: felony charges and prison time in the case of death; civil liability charges in the case of injury, property damage or death; and increased insurance rates."

Providing alcohol to your child's friends may be illegal, but providing alcohol to minors is also very unsafe. There have been many cases throughout the nation of teens dying at "supervised" house parties, whether they get alcohol poisoning, drown in the pool, or get into an accident. Even if you take the car keys away, there is still a chance that someone could get hurt – and then you could be liable for it. (See more information about Social Host below.)

MYTH: I can't get in trouble if my child hosts a party and serves alcohol without my permission or knowledge.

FACT: Minnesota counties have “Social Host Ordinances,” in which individuals can be held criminally responsible for hosting or allowing an event where persons under age 21 possess or consume alcohol, regardless of who supplied the alcohol.

This means that you as a parent *may* still be held liable if your child hosts a party where underage youth are consuming alcohol, even if you didn’t know about the party. It can be up to the police officer’s discretion.

MYTH: If I teach my child to drink responsibly, he/she won’t have any problems with alcohol.

FACT: Research has found NO proven strategy for parents to teach youth how to drink responsibly. Some research even suggests that letting kids try alcohol at a young age can increase the likelihood that they will start drinking at earlier ages. Drinking at home does NOT prevent children from drinking outside the home.

Some parents may believe that they can “teach their kids a lesson” by having them drink so much alcohol in one setting that they become sick. The idea is that after that experience, the child will be so disgusted by alcohol that they won’t be tempted to try it again. However, this is an extremely dangerous (and ineffective!) practice. In fact, kids have even died from alcohol poisoning after these “lessons.”

Some research suggests that family structure may play a role when it comes to responsible drinking. One study reported that teens living with both biological parents, and who were allowed to drink at home, showed the lowest levels of alcohol use and problems over time. Teens who come from non-intact, blended, or single parent households showed highest levels of substance use over time.

The most important things a parent can do?

- 1) Send clear, consistent messaging about drugs and alcohol – that it’s unacceptable for youth to consume either. Offering your child a sip of beer or letting him/her have wine with dinner, for example, can send mixed messages. It can be difficult for youth to understand when and where it is okay for them to consume alcohol when your rules are unclear.
- 2) Be sure to supervise and monitor your child’s behavior.

MYTH: If my kids are drinking, they’re not getting the alcohol from me.

FACT: According to the Minnesota Student Survey, the majority of youth surveyed in Washington County get alcohol at parties or from their friends. However, a high percentage of youth do get alcohol from their parents – or by taking it from their home. 20% of 11th grade females reported taking alcohol from their homes, and 14% reported getting it from their parents.

Even if you’re not directly giving your kids alcohol, having alcohol in the home can still be a risk. Be sure to securely lock up alcohol and keep an eye on your stock.

MYTH: If I am too strict about my children drinking underage, it will cause them to drink more when they leave home.

FACT: Research has found that teens who perceive their parents to be more permissive about alcohol use are MORE likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs. Having clear, consistent rules and expectations about drug and alcohol use is extremely important, as is following through on consequences when these rules are not followed.

Resources

CADCA, “No Proven Strategy’ for Parents to Teach Kids Responsible Drinking, Says Study” (2014)
<http://50-201-129-166-static.hfc.comcastbusiness.net/resources/detail/%E2%80%9Cno-proven-strategy%E2%80%9D-parents-teach-kids-responsible-drinking-says-study>

Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, “Should Parents Allow Their Adolescence Children to Drink at Home? Family Factors as Predictors of Alcohol Involvement Trajectories Over 15 Years”
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2015.76.661>

Minnesota Department of Public Safety
<https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ots/educational-materials/Documents/teens-le-alcohol-laws-guide.pdf>

Minnesota Department of Health, “Minnesota Student Survey”
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss/>

Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, “Teens and Parents” (2012)
<http://www.drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/PATS-2012-FULL-REPORT2.pdf>