



Parent-Focused National Media Campaign



Fact Sheet

Approximately 88,000 Americans die from alcohol-attributed causes each year, making alcohol the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States.¹ Additionally, another 64,000 annual deaths are attributable to drug overdoses.² The benefits of reducing underage drinking and substance use are substantial, including saving lives and dollars, and promoting the health of young people. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) "Talk. They Hear You."[®] Campaign's goal is to provide parents and caregivers with the resources they need to address the issue of alcohol and other drugs with their children under the age of 21. The Campaign seeks to:

- Increase parents' awareness of the prevalence and risks of underage drinking and substance use;
- Equip parents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to prevent

underage drinking and substance use; and

- Increase actions by parents to prevent underage drinking and substance use.

Adolescents Are Engaging in Underage Drinking and Substance Use

Alcohol continues to be the most widely used substance among America's youth, with an estimated 7.4 million people younger than the age of 21 drinking alcohol in the past month.³ Marijuana is also prevalent among adolescents. An estimated 1.2 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 used marijuana for the first time in 2017, which translates to approximately 3,300 adolescents each day.⁴

Additionally, more than one-third of adolescents are misusing prescription pain medications. Research indicates that 53 percent of people aged 12 to 17 obtained

prescription pain relievers for the most recent nonmedical use from a friend or relative for free.⁵

Underage Drinking and Substance Use Are Serious Problems

Underage Drinking

Some kids start drinking at a young age—Many young people start drinking before the age of 15.⁶ Thirty-three percent of eighth graders in the United States said they tried alcohol at some time in their lives, and 65 percent of teens who do drink reported that they get drunk in a typical month.^{7,8}



Alcohol can affect brain function—Alcohol use can permanently impair brain function by affecting actual physical development of the brain structure as well as brain functioning. Negative effects include decreased ability in planning, executive functioning, memory, spatial operations, and attention.⁹

Alcohol can lead to other substance use—Alcohol use is associated with a greater likelihood of using other substances, including marijuana, tobacco, and other drugs.¹⁰

Marijuana

Marijuana can harm adolescent brain development—Marijuana use distorts how adolescent minds perceive the world,

causing poor judgment and decision-making, including unprotected sex and driving while intoxicated. Marijuana use can cause a lack of balance and coordination (possibly increasing injury risk in activities such as driving and sports) in youth.¹¹ It is also linked to earlier onset of psychosis in youth known to be at risk for schizophrenia.¹²

Marijuana is addictive—Nine percent of people who try marijuana become addicted.¹³

Marijuana use can lead to use disorder—Recent data suggest that 30 percent of those who use marijuana may have some degree of marijuana use disorder.¹⁴

Opioids

Prescription pain medication can be addictive—Even if a doctor prescribes an opioid, there are still risks when taking them, including addiction and death. In 2017, an estimated 2.1 million people ages 12 or older had an opioid use disorder.¹⁵

Misusing prescription pain medication is unsafe and illegal—It is illegal to take prescription medications without a doctor's prescription. Taking prescription medications that aren't prescribed to you (even just one time) can land you in the hospital or even cause death.

Mixing prescription medication with alcohol can be fatal—Mixing opioids with other substances can cause dangerous side effects, including breathing trouble, coma, and even permanent brain damage or death.¹⁶

The Consequences of Underage Drinking and Substance Use Can Be Devastating

The consequences of underage drinking and substance use can include:

- Injury or death from accidents¹⁷;
- Unintended, unwanted, and unprotected sexual activity^{18,19};
- Mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety disorders²⁰;
- Difficulty with attention, concentration, problem solving, learning, and memory^{21,22};
- Allergic reactions, breathing trouble, coma, and even permanent brain damage or death²³; and
- Academic problems²⁴.

Underage Drinking and Substance Use Is Not a Top-of-Mind Concern Among Parents

Many parents with children under the age of 21 don't believe underage drinking and substance use are issues to be concerned about and may not have conversations with their kids surrounding these topics. However, parents have a significant influence on their children's decisions to experiment with alcohol or other drugs. Research suggests that one of the most influential factors when a child is growing up is a strong, open relationship with a

parent.²⁵ When parents create supportive and nurturing environments, children make better decisions.

The "Talk. They Hear You."® Campaign is designed to provide parents and caregivers with the information and resources they need to properly address underage drinking and substance use with their children.

"Talk. They Hear You." Provides Parents With Knowledge, Resources, and Confidence

The Campaign uses social media; the website www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov; partnership outreach; and radio, television, and print public service announcements to help parents feel more confident when talking to their children about alcohol and other drugs. Campaign messages:

- Emphasize the importance of parents talking to their kids about underage drinking and substance use prevention before they reach an age when they are confronted with decisions about it;
- Offer advice to parents about preparing children to deal with peer pressure that may lead to alcohol and substance use;
- Focus on helping parents address the issue of underage drinking and substance use in a manner that emphasizes their children's ability to make their own decisions; and

- Model behaviors and situations when parents can begin the conversation about the dangers of alcohol and substance use with their children.

References

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