

Investing in Alcohol-Free Youth

What's the big deal about underage drinking?

Some parents and guardians may feel relieved that their teen is “only” drinking. However, alcohol use is risky business for young people. The human brain continues to develop through the early 20's. The developing brain is very sensitive to alcohol and other drugs.

Alcohol use can change a teen's brain.

A recent study compared the brain scans of teens who binge drink once or twice a month with the scans of teens who don't. The study found...

- Memory damage among teens who binge drink.
- Teen girls' ability to comprehend and interpret visual information, such as math and engineering was affected.
- Teen boys' ability to stay focused was affected.

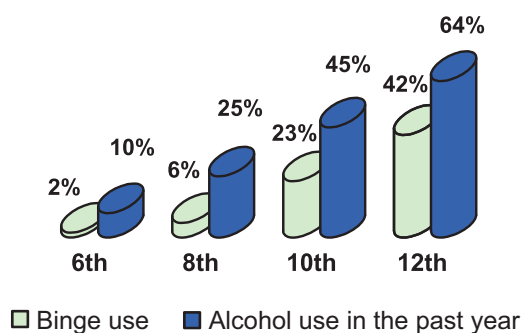
Binge Drinking

4 or 5 drinks on one occasion

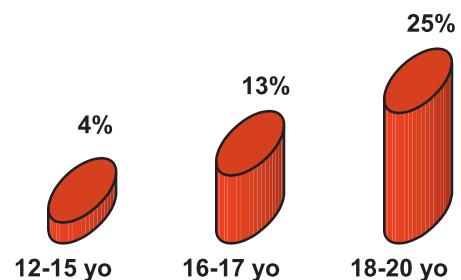
About 90% of the alcohol consumed by youth is in the form of binge drinking.

Binge drinking increases the chance of using other drugs with alcohol.

**Eau Claire County
Youth Reporting Alcohol Use by Grade**



**Eau Claire County
Estimated 12-20 year olds
with a Serious Alcohol Problem**



If drinking is delayed until age 21, the risk of serious alcohol problems is decreased by 70%.

Can we do anything about underage drinking?

YES! The greatest influence on young people's decisions to begin drinking is their parents.

Make no mistake: You can make a difference. While many teens drink alcohol, it doesn't have to be that way. Research shows that teens are much more likely to delay drinking when they feel they have a close, supportive tie with a parent or guardian. The following steps (educate - monitor - enforce) work. Choose a step you feel is doable and begin this week.

EDUCATE: Short, frequent discussions can have a real impact on your child's decisions about alcohol. It's important to continue the conversation throughout adolescence.

"There's a lot of new science about teens, drugs and alcohol. It scares me to know how easily you could damage your brain or get addicted. I want your word that you'll steer clear of all that."

"What are your plans for the weekend?"
"Who will you be with?"
"How can I reach your friend's parents?"

MONITOR: Ask your kids about their plans and check it out. It's not about trust—it's about protecting them.

ENFORCE: Your toughest challenge is to try to respect your child's growing drive for independence while still providing support and appropriate limits.

"What you are doing is not what we agreed on."
(The rule is... The consequence is... Try to be warm but firm.)
"I'm not trying to ruin your fun. I love you and I want you stay healthy. The way to do that is to stay completely away from drugs and alcohol."



Youth report that parents have the greatest influence on whether or not they drink.

Kids who learn about risks of drugs from their parents are 50% less likely to use drugs than those who do not get the message at home.

For more conversation starters & tips, go to www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov

Are teens safer when parents provide alcohol for them?

New research tells us.... **NO!**

When parents provide alcohol to teens, they are more likely to:

- Engage in heavier drinking
- Drink more often
- Get into traffic crashes

Could youth be drinking in your home without you knowing?

Eau Claire County youth who drink tell us they....

- Drink most often at home or a friend's home
- Drink most often on weekends
- Get their alcohol from adults



What can you and other adults do?

- Refuse to allow anyone under 21 to drink alcohol in your home or on your property.
- Think about where alcohol is kept in your home and how much you have on hand. Monitor your supply.
- Make sure that alcohol is stored safely (locked away, if possible) in your home.
- Hold your ground. Don't provide, ignore, or excuse the use of alcohol with youth.
- Talk with other parents about this mailing, and your plans to keep teens safe.

Youth who begin drinking before age 15 are 6 times more likely to abuse alcohol or have alcohol problems as adults. On average, **Eau Claire youth report first using alcohol at age 13.**

Working Together for Alcohol-Free Youth

The Reality Check 21 Partnership includes youth and adults from Altoona, Augusta, Eau Claire, and Fall Creek. Protecting our children is a goal shared by all of us. Allowing youth to drink is unsafe, unhealthy and illegal.

If you're interested in learning more about talking with your teens or how you can lock up that extra fridge in the garage or basement, check out our new website at: www.getinvolvedASAP.org

Reality Check 21 Partnership—
 Kristin Hildebrand
 715-839-2874



Eau Claire Area Schools—Jean Christenson 715-852-3104
 Altoona Schools—Heather Burich Holle 715-838-4379
 Augusta Schools—Sarah Brenner 715-286-3347
 Fall Creek Schools—Amanda Peters 715-877-2809
 Regis Catholic Schools—Jill Urdahl..... 715-830-2271

Sources

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- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/Alcohol/
- National Survey on Drug Use & Health 2009, www.samhsa.gov
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Eau Claire, WI 54701

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Protect Your Kids

Could youth
be drinking
in your home?

