



Maine Community Youth Assistance Foundation

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 18, 2012

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Alcohol is Harmful to Young Minds

In some families and cultures, teens are allowed to drink alcohol. For others, as long as their teenager doesn't drink and drive, it's acceptable. But teen drinking can cause both immediate and long-term harm.

According to a National Geographic magazine article entitled *Teenage Brains* from October 2011 by David Dobbs, "...in a series of scans of the developing adolescent brain—a National Institutes of Health (NIH) project that studied over a hundred young people as they grew up during the 1990s—showed that our brains undergo a massive reorganization between our 12th and 25th years. The brain doesn't actually grow very much during this period...[having] reached 90 percent of its full size by the time a person is six...But as we move through adolescence, the brain undergoes extensive remodeling, resembling a network and wiring upgrade."

This rewiring occurs during the time when teens' judgment, impulses and emotions are not yet mature. Adding alcohol can threaten their safety in the short-term and have long-lasting effects.

While most teens in Maine Township don't drink alcohol, when they do, they put themselves at risk for poor academic performance, injury and violence, car accidents, unplanned and unprotected sexual activity, and alcohol poisoning or overdose.

Long-term effects may include learning and memory issues, problem-solving difficulties, other drug use, irrational behavior and addiction. In fact, youth who start drinking before 15 years old are five times more likely to develop problems with alcohol later in life.

What can parents do to help their kids make healthy choices and avoid alcohol?

Parents can share facts with their kids during elementary school about how alcohol harms young minds, and
Alcohol, Drug and Tobacco Free Youth

continue to explain in age appropriate ways during the pre-teen and high school years why it's best to avoid alcohol.

Here's one example: "Because your brain won't be fully developed until you are in your 20's, it's better to delay drinking alcohol. The area most responsible for planning, thinking, decision-making and impulse control matures last, so damage from drinking may be long-term and irreversible. Alcohol affects memory and learning too, and it can impact your school work, including tests, grades and potentially college admission. I want you to be the healthiest, best person you can be, so I ask you not to drink until you're at least 21, the legal age."

Parents are #1 reason

Teens say that parents are the main reason they choose not to drink, so make sure your teen knows that you disapprove of his or her drinking and the reasons why. To learn more about the risks and harm of alcohol, go to www.mcyaf.com/alcohol_q_and_a.htm.

Read the full National Geographic article at <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/10/teenage-brains/dobbs-text>.

About MCYAF

The Maine Community Youth Assistance Foundation is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to provide Maine Township residents with a foundation to make healthier choices. MCYAF works with parents, schools, police, youth, government, health care providers, social service, faith and civic organizations toward a common goal of healthy youth. MCYAF secures federal and state grants as well as corporate and private donations for programs and services that promote improved health for residents. For more information, see www.mcyaf.com or contact us at (847) 858-7090.

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