



Winter 2011 issue

# Maine Source

Tips and Talk About Raising Healthy Youth in Maine Township

## Underage Drinking -- Do You Disapprove? Let your child know.

To drink or not to drink...that is the question many teens are faced with. The answer to that question begins with parents. Parents are very influential when kids make the choice to drink alcohol or not.

High school students in Maine Township who feel their **parents** think it's wrong for them to drink actually avoid alcohol more often than students who feel their parents don't think it's wrong. And youth that think **most adults in their neighborhood** think it's wrong for them to drink alcohol also drink significantly less often. \*

\*Data source: 2010 Illinois Youth Survey 5,473 Maine Township High School students

Clearly, this is evidence about the importance of letting youth know that underage drinking is not OK as a community.

Underage Drinking. Do you disapprove? Let your child know. If you don't say anything to your child about alcohol use, you may be giving the impression that underage drinking is acceptable.

Some parents give mixed messages about underage drinking, such as...

*"If you do drink, please don't drive."* A teen might think that her parent is saying it's OK to drink as long as she doesn't drive. By trying to limit use, you are giving permission to drink.

*"He'll be away at college soon. He might as well get some experience drinking before he goes."* Parents may think that teens need "practice" drinking, but that is simply not true. The longer teens delay starting to use alcohol, the more likely they won't have alcohol use or abuse problems later in life.

*"You and your friends can drink here at our house. At least you'll be somewhere safe."* When parents give permission for a child to drink alcohol in one situation, the child may take that as blanket approval. In Illinois, it is illegal to provide alcohol to anyone under 21.

*"What parents may not realize is that children say... parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink."*

Charles Curie, SAMHSA administrator, US Dept. of Health and Human Services

Sending a clear no use message is important. We know that when parents clearly disapprove of alcohol use, kids are less likely to drink.

Have you been clear about your family rules and values? See if there's a difference between what you think you said about underage drinking and what your child heard.

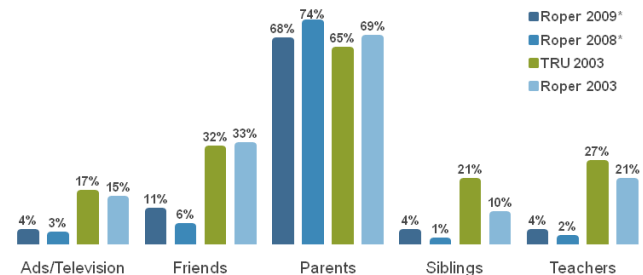
### Family Rule About Underage Alcohol Use

Parent Says	Child Hears
We've talked about rules and consequences.	I know what my parent thinks and the consequences if I drink.
I don't need to talk about it. He/she knows what I think.	It must be OK since we haven't talked about it.

Discuss what the actual rule is. Be specific in your conversations. State what the expected behavior is and what the consequence will be for breaking the rule. Write it down and stick with it.

### To Drink or Not to Drink

Parents Have the Most Influence on Whether or Not Their Child Will Drink Alcohol



Source: TRU Omnibus (10-18 year olds); Roper Youth Report (8-17 year olds)  
\*In 2008 and 2009 the respondents could only select one response for this question. Previous years surveys allowed multiple responses to this question.



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## Taking Healthy Risks

*Risk-taking may appear to be rebellion, but it's simply part of teens' struggle to find their identity and to separate from others, including their parents.*

Healthy risk-taking is a positive tool in an adolescent's life for discovering and developing his or her identity. Children give clues about how they do or don't take risks, e.g., how they ride a bike or skateboard, or how they handle (new) social situations. These clues contribute to styles or patterns of risk-taking. There are many styles... cautious, middle-of-the-roader, adventurer, and the teen whose risk-taking increases when around friends. Risk-taking can accelerate in one area – social, physical, intellectual, artistic or sexual – and not in others.

Part of raising healthy kids is knowing when to let children take risks in safe environments vs. taking risks where they could endanger themselves or others. It also means helping children understand their risk patterns. You may want to ask:

Do you feel pressured by friends to make risky choices?

Do you rush into decisions?

Do you think it's un-cool to try things safely?

Are dangerous risks more exciting to you?

Do you make dangerous choices to show or impress others?

Negative risk-taking behaviors include drinking, smoking, drug use, reckless driving, unsafe sexual activity, eating disorders, self-mutilation, running away, stealing, gang activity and more. Healthy risk-taking can help prevent unhealthy risk-taking. The list below may provide ideas on how to help children take healthier risks.

### Unhealthy Risk Behaviors

### Healthy Risk Alternatives

Eating disorders

Physical activities or sports from walking or running to skating, rock climbing, camping or white water rafting

Using alcohol and drugs

Learn or practice creative activities: photography, dance, drawing, painting, creative writing, join a band or play production

Unprotected sexual activity

Learn to talk about developing healthy relationships with parents and partner

Gang violence, bullying

Seek new friends, community volunteering, part-time jobs: babysit, camp counselor, retail clerk in clothing or music store, tutor others, join a faith-based or other youth group

Parents should watch for red flags that help identify dangerous risk-taking, such as persistent depression or anxiety beyond typical adolescent moodiness; school problems; changes in friends; illegal activities; clusters of unhealthy risks (e.g., drinking and driving recklessly; eating disorder and self-mutilation; stealing and running away).

Teens look to their parents for advice and modeling. Parents can help their teens learn how to evaluate risks, anticipate consequences of their choices, and develop strategies to divert their energy into healthier activities. Parents also need to pay attention to their own patterns of risk-taking, because teenagers are watching and imitating us, whether they acknowledge it or not. One example: Drive as you want them to drive.

Try to engage children in conversations and encourage behaviors that can fulfill their need to take risks but are generally not harmful. And give them plenty of time to gain experience – learning how to take healthy risks is a process.

Adapted from *The Romance of Risk: Why Teenagers Do the Things They Do*.  
Lynn E. Ponton, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry, Univ. of CA, San Francisco.

Join a **STICKER SHOCK TEAM** on **April 13th!**

MCYAF is recruiting teens and adults to help reduce underage drinking in Maine Township. Sticker Shock Teams place stickers and decals on alcoholic beverages in retail stores to warn about the dangers of providing alcohol to minors.

Contact [kkohler@omniyouth.org](mailto:kkohler@omniyouth.org)  
by March 1  
to volunteer or for more information.

