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# Tis the Season to Talk of Teens, Drinking, Drugs and the Holidays

You don't want that call in the middle of the night

December 29, 2011

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*About this column: Handy Suggestions*

 Related Topics: [United Prevention Coalition of Fairfax County](#) and [mclean VA](#)

 Becky York of the [Unified Prevention Coalition of Fairfax County](#) sent along these reminders of teens, drinking and the holiday.

It's the holiday season when family and friends gather to celebrate together. It's also a time when many teens find the opportunity and access to experiment and use alcohol and other drugs.

Many teens report that they obtain the alcohol they drink from their parents, friends' parents, siblings, or older friends, with or without permission.

Parents are still the strongest influencers in their children's lives. Among 10-18 year olds, 65 percent cite their parents as the leading influence for them not to drink. Help make this holiday season safe for teens by following these tips compiled by the

- Make time to talk with your children. The holidays are a time to reconnect as a family. Make sure they understand the risks of underage drinking and drug use.
- Educate your family on the risks associated with underage drinking and its proven harmful effects on the brain. The legal drinking age is 21, and students who wait until then are 84 percent less likely to develop an addiction than those who start earlier.
- Make it clear to your child(ren) that you do NOT approve of their drinking alcohol or using drugs. For students returning home from college, you likely will need to remind them of your expectations.
- Ensure that alcohol or other substances will not be available at parties your teen attends. Check in with other parents to verify there will be parental supervision, and that events will be alcohol-free.
- Be vigilant in your own home about NOT providing access to alcohol or drugs. Be sure to lock up your liquor cabinet when you are away. If you host a party in your own home for adults, keep an eye on the alcohol and teens at the party.
- Know that an adult who provides alcohol to a minor is breaking the law and risking that teen's life.
- Secure other cabinets and make sure all your medications and prescriptions are secure. Be aware of the dangers of prescription and over-the-

counter drugs, including cough syrup, and how they can be misused.

- Please help protect your child's bright future by providing a safe, alcohol- and drug-free season of celebrations for your son or daughter. Visit [www.unifiedpreventioncoalition.org](http://www.unifiedpreventioncoalition.org) for more information.

[Unified Prevention Coalition of Fairfax County](#), P.O. Box 3734, Oakton, VA 22124

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5:14 pm on Thursday, December 29, 2011

Three concepts that we at BreakingTheCycles.com find helpful when having these kinds of discussions with children, teens and parents, are: 1) raising awareness about the 21st century brain research that explains why the teen brain is not the same as that of an adult's and therefore why the teen brain is affected differently by binge drinking (or drugs) than the brain of an adult's, 2) helping people understand how the body processes alcohol, which is why it has such an impact on the brain, 3) sharing research showing the Europeans do not have underage drinking figured out, either.

With regards to #1, this article, "How Teens Become Alcoholics Before Age 21," <http://tiny.cc/pyesf>, helps to explain this relatively new brain research and why alcohol is harmful to the teen brain in a way it is not necessarily harmful to the adult brain. With regards to #2, this article, "Why BAC Can Keep Rising After a Person Stops Drinking," <http://tiny.cc/u0o99>, helps explain alcohol's impact on the brain and a person's decision-making capabilities. With regards to #3, the U.S. Surgeon General's 2007 Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking shares research findings (on page 9 of the Call) showing all but 1 of the 19 European countries surveyed having more students ages 15-16 than the U.S. who have engaged in binge drinking (5+drinks) within the past 30 days.

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