

OPEN PLEA TO ALL PARENTS OF YOUNG DRIVERS.....

By Vicki Serrano, Prevention Specialist,
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For over ten years now, I have worked with young people who have been cited for an underage DUI offense, also known as a “zero tolerance” offense in Kentucky (blood alcohol level of anything over a .02%). I want to talk for a few minutes to parents. There is information you need to know. There are things your children are doing that you aren’t aware of. Things which are very dangerous. Things you can help prevent. I work with over 100 underage DUI offenders from this region alone each year, in a very specialized program in Louisville. Every weekend, kids from 16 to 20 years of age, already inexperienced behind the wheel, are drinking anywhere from 1 to 12 and more alcoholic drinks, using marijuana, prescription pills, etc., before they drive home to you, if they make it home. If they’re lucky, they’ll get arrested and taken to jail to sober up before being released. Those not so lucky will find themselves hanging upside down in a mangled hunk of metal, blood dripping from their head, as they are forced to wait for someone to extract them from the vehicle. Others, not a scratch anywhere to be found on their body, have completely devastated and forever changed the life of the person, or family of the person, in the other car they hit or ran off the road. I have talked with youth who have lost family trust, jobs, college scholarships, their friends, their car, and their reputation, because of impaired driving. I have worked with youth who have lost limbs, had to endure numerous surgeries and skin grafts, and have killed innocent people, as a result of the car crash they caused.

I want to do anything and everything I can to keep this from happening in our community. Here are some things every parent needs to know:

- Please stop saying...”my kid wouldn’t do that...I know my kid...they tell me everything...my kid has more common sense than that...he’s a good kid...I know she doesn’t drink and drive...” The kids drinking, drugging, and driving, are the ones who are Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and Asian, are from the west end, east end, and the farms, are mostly from families whose income is anywhere from \$5,000 to \$300,000 a year. These kids are straight A students and high school drop outs, athletic prodigies and bookworms. These kids are from “intact” homes and “broken” homes. And no young person tells their parent EVERYTHING, no matter how much we need to believe they do.
- Young people have no idea how to properly and safely use alcohol. Many adults don’t either. For those over 21, one serving of alcohol is about the same as one 12 oz domestic beer, one 5oz serving of standard table wine, or a 1-1/2 oz shot glass of 80 proof liquor. There is a half ounce of pure alcohol in each of these different beverages. It takes the average **adult male** about one hour, sometimes longer, for their body to absorb, metabolize, and eliminate one serving. **ONE HOUR – ONE SERVING. The adult female body needs even more time to metabolize one serving.** And there are limits to the quantity one should consume at a time.
- When kids use alcohol, they abuse it. They get drunk. Very drunk. They get sick and vomit, then laugh with their friends on Monday who tell them all the crazy things they did

and said that they themselves can't remember. This is called a "blackout". It's not really funny when someone consumes enough of a substance to temporarily damage the part of the brain that forms and stores memories. It's dangerous. If they aren't fortunate enough to vomit out the excessive alcohol or pills they've ingested, you'll be getting a call from the hospital to come be with your kid who is having his stomach pumped with black liquid charcoal before they die of alcohol poisoning or drug overdose.

- Young brains, as opposed to the brain of a mature adult in their late 20s and older, are much more sensitive and vulnerable to the deleterious effects of substances like illegal drugs, nicotine and alcohol. This is the number one reason the minimum legal drinking age must remain at 21. Alcohol and drugs can damage a young person's brain much more quickly and severely than someone older. Some damage is permanent, such as lifelong learning and emotional difficulties, memory and attention deficits.
- Yes, you can be convicted of DUI from being impaired on marijuana, prescription pills, and over the counter cough and cold remedies. I see more and more underage DUI cases involving these products.
- Finally, and some of you may not like this, but saying things like, "*I don't mind them drinking a couple of beers.....as long as they don't drive.*" Or, "*All kids are going to try alcohol and marijuana....it's part of being a teenager*", is very confusing for young people and the latter is simply not the case. It's the equivalent of dropping a bunch of 5 year old children off for a day in a candy shop and expecting them to "use good judgment" by only eating a couple pieces of candy. It is just not reasonable to expect that level of judgment and insight at such a young age. When parents and adults stop buying into and perpetuating these kinds of dangerous myths, our young people will stop buying into it as well, then fewer and fewer kids will be seriously injured or die each year because of alcohol and drug use.

****Alcohol or drug related car crashes are the number one cause of death for young people in this country****. Parents and adults have direct culpability in youth substance abuse. I am urging everyone to learn more about the harm of alcohol and drug use in young people. Tell your kids that it is illegal and dangerous for anyone under 21 to use alcohol...at all, any amount, or to use marijuana and other drugs, and it will not be tolerated in your home. Set a good example by not using alcohol and drugs, or by using alcohol only in a very smart manner, never to intoxication. Below are more facts and statistics from the Centers for Disease Control:

The Problem

- According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), about three in every ten Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some point in their lives.
- In 2006, 13,470 people died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes, accounting for nearly one-third (32%) of all traffic-related deaths in the United States.

- In one year, over 1.4 million drivers were arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics. This accounts for less than 1% of the 159 million self-reported episodes of alcohol-impaired driving among U.S. adults each year.
- Alcohol-related crashes in the United States cost about \$51 billion a year.

Know How Communities Can Help

Proven community and state-level methods for reducing alcohol-impaired driving include:

- **Sobriety checkpoints.** Studies found that fatal crashes thought to involve alcohol dropped by about 22% following implementation of sobriety checkpoints.
- **Minimum legal drinking age (MLDA) laws.** Studies found that raising the MLDA to 21 reduced crashes by about 16% among people ages 18-20 years.
- **0.08% BAC laws.** Fatal alcohol-related crashes declined about 7% after 0.08% BAC laws were passed.
- **"Zero tolerance" laws for young drivers.** Three studies found that zero tolerance laws resulted in declines in fatal crashes among drivers ages 16-20 years of age, between 9% and 24%.

If you would like to know more or are concerned about a young person's involvement with alcohol or drugs, please contact: Vicki Serrano, M.A., C.P.S., EIP/ZT Coordinator at Seven Counties Services, Inc., (502) 589-8600, or by email vserrano@sevencounties.org.