

# Talking to your children about alcohol

By Leslie Haxby McNeill  
Guest Columnist

One of the questions I pose to students who have been cited for alcohol or drugs is, "What do you want other students to know about drinking?" They are seeing me usually for underage drinking or overconsumption and, increasingly, false identification to buy and consume alcohol underage.

What do they say? Most often, they reply:

■ Drinking underage is not worth the risk and the costs, financial and otherwise. Understand that the legal consequences can be significant and costly.

■ Be moderate or abstain; have fun without drinking or drinking a lot. Not everybody drinks. You can have fun without

drinking, and most assuredly without drinking to excess.

■ Hang out with people who don't drink or drink moderately.

I also ask them what their parents have told them or talked with them about drinking. The student often reports the parent saying, "I know you're going to drink. Don't be dumb about it and just don't get caught."

This is what I would like parents to know:

Drinking ages have changed over the years, so no wonder we have such a confused relationship with alcohol. President Ronald Reagan signed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act requiring all states to change the drinking

age to 21 or face a 10 percent loss in state highway funding 30 years ago, on July 17, 1984.

We all know it is illegal to provide alcohol to people under 21, except for our own children. We know the consequences for us allowing underage drinking for other children can be significant. We see campaigns like Ohio's Drug Free Action Alliance "Parents Who Host Lose the Most" or "Buzzkill: Serve Under 21 and the Party is Over."

The pattern of drinking starts much earlier than 21. We know a percentage of teens start high-risk alcohol use in high school. PRIDE surveys tell us they drink in their homes or their friends' homes.

Start the conversation early. Children are aware

of alcohol from a young age. Alcohol-free childhood and adolescence is best. Evidence shows that children who drink at a younger age drink more than those who delay their first drink.

The debate of lowering the drinking age has no scientific evidence to prove that it helps children have more responsible attitudes toward drinking. In fact, a report by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention shows that all European countries (except Iceland) have a higher binge drinking rate than the U.S.

Teach your child that alcohol can be enjoyed when used moderately. Past about a .05 BAC (blood alcohol concentration), risks of negative

consequences, including tolerance, increase.

Nearly three quarters of children age 9-17 would turn to their parents first for information and advice on drinking alcohol.

Let them know they can ask you anything, at any time, about alcohol. If you don't know the answer, suggest you find out together.

Leslie Haxby McNeill, assistant director of student wellness at Miami University, has worked in alcohol and other drug prevention since 2001. This is one of a series of monthly columns being coordinated by the Butler County Coalition for Healthy, Safe and Drug-Free Communities to call attention to alcohol and other drug issues facing county residents.