



ORGANIZING A TOWN HALL MEETING

Key Facts

- Alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth. A higher percentage of youth in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades used alcohol in the month prior to being surveyed than used tobacco or marijuana, the illicit drug most commonly used by adolescents.¹
- In 2008, about 10.1 million persons aged 12 to 20 (26.4 percent of this age group) reported drinking alcohol in the past month. Approximately 6.6 million were binge drinkers (1.5 percent among 12 or 13 year olds, 6.9 percent among 14 or 15 year olds, 17.2 percent among 16 or 17 year olds, 33.7 percent among persons aged 18 to 20), and 2.1 million (5.5 percent) were heavy drinkers.²
- Alcohol use among children and adolescents starts early and increases rapidly with age. In 2008, nearly 16 percent of 8th graders, almost 29 percent of 10th graders, and over 43 percent of 12th graders reported drinking an alcoholic beverage in the previous month. Heavy drinking is a problem at all three grade levels. Among eighth graders, about 1 in 20 (5.4 percent) reported being drunk at least once in the past month. Nearly 1 out of every 7 10th graders (14.4 percent) and about 2 out of every 7 12th graders (27.6 percent) reported being drunk at least once in the last month.³
- Early onset of drinking can be a marker for future problems, including alcohol dependence and other substance abuse. Those who begin drinking alcohol before the age of 15 are five times more likely than those who start at age 21 and older to develop alcohol problems.⁴
- Each year, approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking. This figure includes about 1,900 deaths from motor vehicle crashes; 1,600 as a result of homicides; 300 from suicide; and hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings.⁵
- Underage alcohol use increases the risk of being involved in physical and sexual assault and can lead to risky sexual behavior. It also is associated with academic failure, illicit drug use, tobacco use, and a range of physical consequences—from hangovers to deaths from alcohol poisoning.⁶
- Alcohol can cause alterations in the structure and function of the developing brain, which continues to mature into a person's twenties, and may have consequences reaching far beyond adolescence.⁶
- Perceived parental disapproval is a powerful influence on youthful alcohol use. Children who believe their parents would strongly disapprove of their using a particular substance are less likely to do so than those whose parents somewhat disapprove or neither approve nor disapprove.⁷
- Parental involvement is another important factor. In 2008, past-month use of illicit drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol (including binge drinking) was lower among youth aged 12 to 17 who reported that their parents always or sometimes engaged in monitoring behaviors (for example, helping children with homework, limiting television and time out with friends on school nights, and requiring them to do chores) than among youth whose parents "seldom" or "never" engaged in such behaviors.²



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References

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- ² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). 2009. *Results from the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings* (electronic version). Retrieved from <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh/2k8nsduh/2k8Results.cfm>.
- ³ NIDA. 2008. *Monitoring the Future: National Results on Adolescent Drug Use—Overview of Key Findings, 2008* (electronic version). Retrieved from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/PDF/overview2008.pdf>.
- ⁴ SAMHSA. October 2004. *The NSDUH Report: Alcohol Dependence or Abuse and Age at First Use* (electronic version). Retrieved from <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/2k4/ageDependence/ageDependence.htm>.
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). 2007. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking: What It Means to You: A Guide to Action for Families* (electronic version), p. 10. Retrieved from <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/>.
- ⁶ HHS. 2007. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action To Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* (electronic version), p. 11. Retrieved from <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking/>.
- ⁷ SAMHSA. 2009. *Results from the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings* (electronic version). Retrieved from <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh/2k8nsduh/2k8Results.cfm>.