

KNOW **THE** BUZZ

ON UNDERAGE DRINKING



It Starts with **You**. **Talk** Early.
Talk Often. And **Listen**.



Tri-County Community Action Agency
Southern Providence County
Regional Coalition
Cranston • Johnston • North Providence • Scituate • Smithfield

Dear Parents,

Welcome to “Know the Buzz... on underage drinking” – a guide for parents on teenage drinking. It provides information on alcohol use, gives practical advice for parents on how to deal with it and explains what the law says about teenagers and alcohol. This magazine will be useful both to parents who:

- want to delay their teenager starting to drink; or
- know or suspect that their teenager may be drinking

Research shows that clear messages from parents that underage drinking is unacceptable delays drinking in teenagers. Many teenagers will experiment with alcohol. The more important factor in delaying your teenager from drinking is positive parenting based on good communication, negotiation and setting firm limits. No matter what teenagers say or what you think, they want parents to talk to them about alcohol. They want their parents to:

- be informed;
- know the facts; and
- set limits for them.

This magazine will help you to help your teenager. We are here to support you!

The Southern Providence County Regional Prevention Coalition



ALCOHOL and the effects on a developing brain

Research shows that alcohol affects a developing child's brain differently than an adult brain. “The brain goes through dynamic changes during adolescence, and alcohol can seriously damage long- and short-term growth processes.” (American Medical Association Fact Sheet, 2003).

Alcohol may impair memory, learning, decision-making and impulse control; and it greatly increases the risk of addiction. In addition, alcohol can cause young people to develop social problems, have poor judgement, get into trouble, do poorly in school and experience failure in achieving lifelong goals.

To compound this problem, research shows that parents generally underestimate the extent of adolescent drinking and its negative consequences. Thirty-one percent of youth who said that they had been drunk in the past year were said by their parents to be non-drinkers. Others may view underage drinking as inevitable, but it isn't. To be alcohol-free, an adolescent needs parents who are trained in **BONDING** (creating a warm, loving relationship), setting **BOUNDARIES** (discussing clear, firm rules about no-underage alcohol use), and **MONITORING** (knowing where your kids are and making sure that they stay in an alcohol-and-drug-free social environment at all times).

Alcohol affects a kid's brain differently than an adult brain.

- The brain's hippocampus (responsible for learning and memory), can be 10% smaller in underage drinkers
- It can actually cause serious harm to the still-developing adolescent brain (10-21 years)



PARENTS

are the #1 reason kids don't drink

There are many pressures and opportunities for kids to drink. Education alone is not enough to deter adolescents from drinking as they enter difficult social transitions to adulthood. Parents who are actively involved can have a powerful influence on their child's decision to remain alcohol-free.

Kids perceptions of parental disapproval are great deterrents. What parents may not realize is that children say parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink.

Research indicates that children are less likely to drink when their parents are involved in their lives and when they and their parents report feeling close to each other. Family conflict and lack of bonding are associated with an increased risk of drinking. Mixed messages and unclear rules and expectations also leave children more vulnerable to underage drinking.



Start Talking By Age 9

- Explain the harms and long term effects that drinking underage can have on the developing brain.
- Sharing values and family history regarding alcohol creates an environment of trust and understanding.
- Encourage your kids to talk to you about their concerns and any questions they have about drinking.
- Set clear rules about not drinking underage.
- Be clear that you don't want your kids to drink alcohol until the legal age of 21.
- Explain that when your kids have reached age 21, if they should decide to drink, they should do so in moderation.

KEEPING YOUR CHILD'S BRAIN HEALTHY



Alcohol hijacks the brains pleasure reward system

The brain rewards positive actions with feelings of pleasure so we want to repeat these actions. We remember "feel-good" brain chemicals (or neurotransmitters), such as dopamine, which connect the pleasure to the thing we enjoyed. Alcohol hijacks our brain's pleasure-reward system by tricking the brain into generating pleasure-reward feelings from a harmful chemical – alcohol – instead of a real experience.

If kids continue drinking, the brain changes and adapts to the presence of alcohol, and soon they need more and more alcohol to create the same amount of pleasure.

Research shows that underage drinking increases the risk of alcohol dependence

If they continue to drink, they will begin to crave it and feel uncomfortable – sometimes even extreme discomfort – without it. They become addicted. Getting their next drink becomes more important than family, grades or even sports.

Because the brain produces an abundance of dopamine, it can go rapidly from liking, to wanting, to needing alcohol, which programs the brain for alcoholism. Alcohol can also harm the brain's ability to sense pleasure from normal, healthy things and experiences – leaving a young person feeling "flat" about things he/she previously enjoyed.

The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) found that among Rhode Island high school students, during the past 30 days

- 21.5% drank some amount of alcohol
- 10.7% binge drank
- 14% rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol
- 10% had had their first drink of alcohol before age 13

Other national surveys

- In 2016, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that 19% of youth aged 12 to 20 years drink alcohol and 12% reported binge drinking in the past 30 days.
- In 2017, the Monitoring the Future Survey reported that 8% of 8th graders and 33% of 12th graders drank during the past 30 days, and 2% of 8th graders and 19% of 12th graders binge drank during the past 30 days.

THE BRAIN & ALCOHOL

BRAIN FUNCTION: The brain is the major organ of the central nervous system and the control center for all of the body's voluntary and involuntary activities. It is responsible for everything we think, feel, see, say and do. The brainstem controls vital body functions, such as breathing and digestion. The cerebellum maintains posture, coordination of body movement and provides long-term storage for memories of how to do things that involve our body-like riding a bike. The cerebrum, which consists of the right and left cerebral hemispheres, is the site of most conscious and intelligent activities.

Alcohol affects an adolescent brain differently than a mature adult brain. The brain goes through rapid development and "wiring" changes during the ages of 12 through the early 20s. Adolescent alcohol use can harm brain wiring, which is essential to become a mature, thoughtful, responsible adult.

Alcohol can harm 3 brain areas:

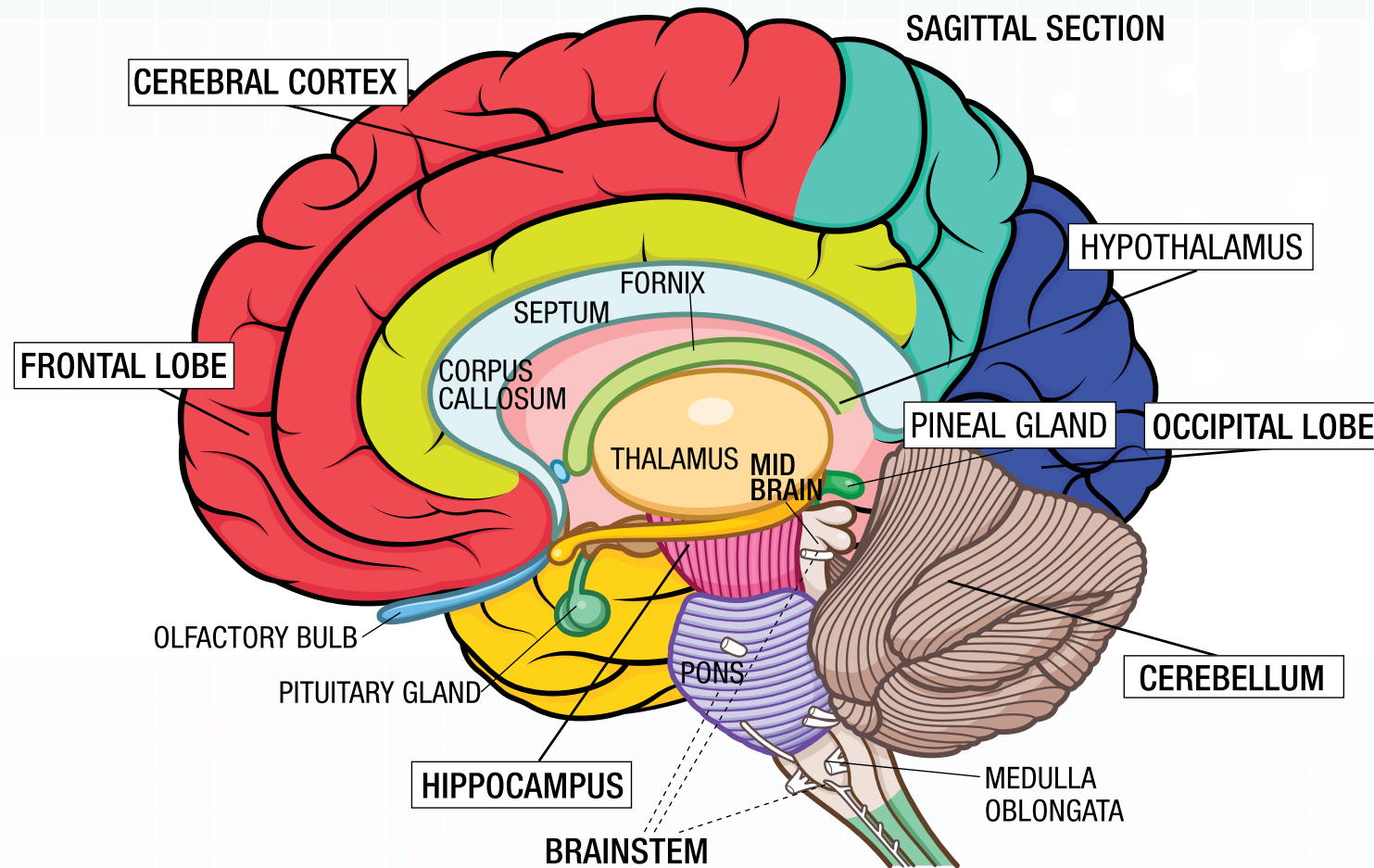
1. "The prefrontal area (responsible for planning, good judgment, decision-making and impulse control) undergoes the most change during adolescence. Researchers found that adolescent drinking could cause severe changes in this area...which plays an important role in forming adult personality and behavior. Harm from alcohol at this time can be long-term and irreversible."

2. "The hippocampus (involved in learning and memory) suffers the worst alcohol-related brain harm in adolescents. Those who had been drinking more and for longer had significantly smaller hippocampi (10%). In addition, short-term or moderate drinking impairs learning and memory for more in youths than adults. Frequent drinkers may never be able to catch up in adulthood, since alcohol inhibits systems crucial for storing new information."

3. The brain is made up of gray matter (neurons) and white matter. Because alcohol suppresses brain activity, it prevents the brain from properly developing its essential "white matter" - the fatty/waxy coating that insulates the part of neurons that send electrical signals.

American Medical Association Fact Sheet, 2003

"...it has become clear that, during adolescence... the brain is highly plastic and shaped by experience...Alcohol appears to interfere with the changes in circuitry that occur during learning."
~Dr. Aaron White, Duke University.



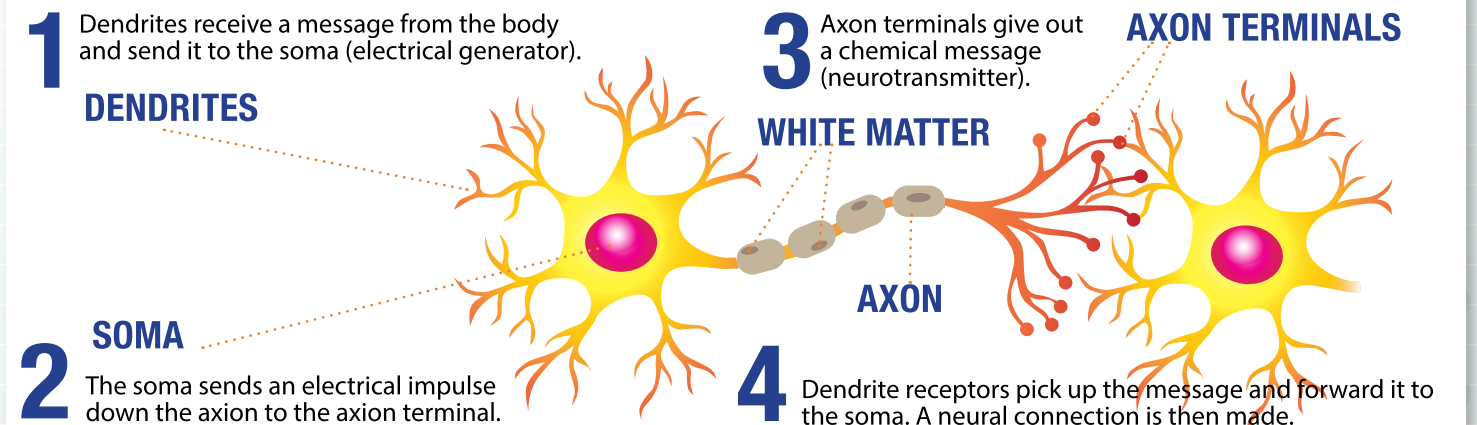
Our Brain is more complex than the world's most powerful computer. It is responsible for everything we think, see, hear, feel, smell or do. It even creates and directs all of our emotions. The brain is divided into different areas that direct different parts of our body.

Like a complex computer, all of the different parts of the brain work at the same time- like parallel processing.

It does this through more than 100 billion brain cells called neurons. A neuron looks sort of like a tree, with "branches" called dendrites, a "trunk" called an axon, and "roots" called axon terminals. The tip of each "root" contains tiny sacks of powerful chemicals called neurotransmitters. At the top of the "trunk" is a tiny electrical generator called a soma. The brain neurons communicate by sending electrical and chemical messages from the "roots" of one neuron to the "branches" of another. If a thought or action is repeated often, the "roots" of one neuron send more chemical and the receiving neuron makes more "branches" to receive it. The neural connection is strengthened until it begins to look like a busy tree instead of a spindly tree. It becomes a dominant neural pathway.

Forty percent of neurons are "wired" at birth. They perform automatic functions such as breathing, heat and lung functions, digestion, etc. The other 6- percent are waiting to be stimulated by our learning and experiences to make connections or "wiring". When we learn new things, new "neural connections" are made in our brain. This is referred to as "wiring" our brain. It is like loading new software into a computer so it can do more things. The more neural connections we make, the smarter and more capable we become. Alcohol suppresses brain development.

How neurons communicate



3 STEPS TO A BRIGHT FUTURE



Like nearly anything worthwhile, keeping your children alcohol-free takes effort, commitment and consistency. Fortunately, the process can be both fun and rewarding. Develop and use the following skills and you're well on your way.

1 BONDING STAY CLOSE TO YOUR KIDS

Bonding is essential to preventing underage drinking. Children are less likely to drink when their parents are involved in their lives, and when children and parents feel close to each other.

SPEND TIME TOGETHER

Try to spend at least 15 minutes a day of one-on-one time, doing things your kid likes to do.

DO FUN ACTIVITIES TOGETHER

Do fun things together on a regular basis. Play catch. Go camping. Do craft projects. Don't skip vacation. Have a weekly "game night." Invite your kids to help plan your weekly activities.

EAT DINNER TOGETHER

Research shows teens who regularly eat as a family five to seven times per week are 33% less likely to use alcohol.

LISTEN AND BE SUPPORTIVE

Take time daily to talk with your kids about their interests and activities. Ask them about their lives, hopes, fears and concerns. Encourage them to do well in school.

CREATE A POSITIVE HOME ENVIRONMENT

Be kind and respectful of each other. Remind your kids often that you love them. Acknowledge all the positive things your kids do. When you spend time in their world, they'll listen when you speak from yours.

2 BOUNDARIES SET CLEAR RULES AND EXPECTATIONS

Talk to your children about alcohol and set clear rules against underage drinking. Children respond better when they have clear expectations about alcohol. Never assume your children know what your rules, expectations and attitudes about alcohol are. Write down your rules and discuss them with your children so they understand the reasons behind them.

KNOW YOUR CHILDREN'S FRIENDS AND THEIR PARENTS

Studies show significant increased risk for underage drinking is influenced by whether your children's friends drink. Get to know their friends and the parents of those friends. Discuss with the parents your desire to keep your kids alcohol-free and enlist their cooperation.

TEACH THE RISKS OF UNDERAGE DRINKING

At an early age, begin talking with your children about not drinking alcohol. Explain the real risks of underage drinking, ask questions. Make sure they understand.

DISCUSS WHAT TO DO IF ALCOHOL IS PRESENT

It's essential that children have an alcohol-free social environment. Practice saying "no" with your kids. Let them know they can text or call if there's alcohol and you'll pick them up.

CONSISTENTLY ENFORCE THE RULES

Give appropriate consequences every time and reward your kids for staying alcohol-free.

3 MONITORING WHO, WHAT, WHEN & WHERE

Know where your kids are, who they are with and what they are doing. Stay involved! Studies show parental involvement drops by half between the 6th and 12th grades. It's important to remain engaged throughout their teen years.

KNOW YOUR CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

Help provide safe, enjoyable, no-alcohol fun for your kids and their friends.

ENSURE AN ALCOHOL-FREE ENVIRONMENT

Make sure alcohol isn't available to your kids at home or from friends, siblings, etc. If they go to a friend's house, call to make sure parents will be home and there will be no alcohol.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Studies show kids are more at risk for alcohol use between the hours of 3 and 6pm, while many parents are still at work. Call them, send a text, or have a neighbor check in.

OBSERVE YOUR CHILD'S EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Watch for signs of excess stress or depression. These can lead to underage drinking. Help them cope in healthy ways: music, exercise, talking with a counselor, friend or doctor, etc.



FOLLOW THE 5 Ws

Be an involved parent. Asking the 5 Ws puts the steps of bonding, boundaries and monitoring into action. Ask these five questions to know what's going on with your kids and help them to stay alcohol-free:

1. Where are you going?
2. What will you be doing?
3. Who are you with?
4. When will you be home?
5. Will there be alcohol?



PEER PRESSURE & ALCOHOL

WHILE MOST KIDS don't drink, all will likely have alcohol offered to them. Kids who are assertive and have good refusal skills are less likely to drink underage. Decide on good ways to say "no" and practice them often in role-play situations. Here are some ideas:

"Nah, I'm good. Don't wanna disappoint anyone."

"No thanks. I need all the brain cells I've got."

"Actually, I'm not feeling so great, I'll stick with my Gatorade tonight."



ALCOHOL INTERFERES WITH THE BRAIN

The adolescent brain is still developing. Alcohol can impair the parts of the brain that control the following:

Motor coordination – This includes the ability to talk, drive and process information.

Impulse control- Drinking lowers inhibitions and increases the chances that a person will do something they will regret when sober.

Memory- Impaired recollection and even blackouts can occur when too much alcohol has been consumed.

Judgement and decision-making capacity- Drinking may lead young people to engage in risky behavior. Never get in a car with a driver who has recently been drinking. Doing so can result in injury or even death.



- **Processing, purchasing or drinking alcohol before age 21 is illegal.**
- **The minimum legal drinking age saves thousands of lives.**
- **In Rhode Island, it is illegal for anyone to furnish or supply alcohol to a minor- punishable by a fine and potential time in jail.**
- **It is illegal to furnish or procure alcohol for under 21 which is known as the Social Host Law, punishable by a felony charge with up to \$2500 fine and 3 years in prison.**

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH UNDERAGE DRINKING

Alcohol use among children is strongly correlated with violence, poor academic performance and other harmful behaviors. Education alone will not keep your kids from using alcohol because there are constant pressures and opportunities to drink. Further, the areas of the brain that encourage impulsivity and risk-taking develop early, while the areas that improve self-control don't develop until the very late teens or early twenties. You must stay actively involved as a parent, building a strong relationship with your child, setting clear rules against underage drinking and monitoring your child's activities to help them remain alcohol-free.

SCHOOL FAILURE

Kids who use alcohol have higher rates of academic problems and poor performance than non-drinkers. Among eighth graders, higher truancy rates are associated with greater rates of alcohol use.

VIOLENCE

Children who start drinking before age 15 are 12 times more likely to be injured while under the influence of alcohol and 10 times more likely to be in a fight after drinking, compared to those who wait to drink until they are 21.

PROMISCUITY

Alcohol use by adolescents is a strong predictor of unprotected sexual activity and unwanted sexual advances.

ILLICIT DRUG USE

More than 67% of young people who start drinking before the age of 15 will try an illicit drug. Children who drink are 7.5 times more likely to use illicit drugs, 22 times more likely to use marijuana and 50 times more likely to use cocaine than children who never drink.

ALCOHOL HARMS THE YOUNG BRAIN

- Underage drinking is strongly linked with poor academic performance.
- Underage drinkers are over 30 % more likely to be depressed or attempt suicide.
- More than 1/3 of adolescent traffic deaths are alcohol related.
- Alcohol can change how children's brains develop, leading to addiction and difficulties with learning and problem solving.

ALCOHOL POISONING CAN CAUSE DEATH

Most kids have not yet developed the "cut-off" switch that makes them go to sleep or pass out from too much drinking. They can consume dangerous amounts of alcohol before they realize it is too late. This can result in alcohol poisoning which can cause difficulty breathing, unconsciousness and death. Binge drinking can and does kill as many young people as all other drugs combined. If a young person ever passes out from drinking, 911 should be called for immediate medical attention.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IN AN EMERGENCY?

If a teenager is unconscious or 'out of it' after consuming alcohol it is important that you know what to do – it could save their life!

- Turn them on their side.
- Dial 911 and ask for an ambulance.
- Do not leave them alone.
- If it is not your teenager who needs help, contact the other parent involved. Most parents would want to be kept informed.
- If they have taken pills or powder and you come across them, give them to the ambulance personnel.
- Do not worry about who it to blame - the important thing at this point is the teenagers wellbeing.

LET'S TEST WHAT YOU LEARNED!

Now that you have read this magazine, try answering the following questions.

True or False?

1. ___ Alcohol affects an adolescent's brain different than an adult's.
2. ___ The brain is fully developed by age 12.
3. ___ Alcohol poisoning can cause difficulty breathing, unconsciousness and death.
4. ___ Alcohol kills as many young people as all other drugs combined.
5. ___ Alcohol use can impair impulse control, memory, judgement and decision-making skills.
6. ___ Having friends that drink alcohol increases the risk that you will drink too.
7. ___ If a person is unconscious or "passes out," you should immediately call 911.
8. ___ Harm to the brain of underage drinking can be long term and irreversible.
9. ___ People that start drinking by age 13 have a 7% chance of becoming alcohol dependent.
10. ___ The brain's hippocampus is responsible for learning and memory.
11. ___ Studies show that the hippocampus can be 10% smaller in underage drinkers.
12. ___ Alcohol slows down brain activity and hinders development.
13. ___ The brain goes through rapid development and "wiring" changes during the ages of 12 through the early 20s.
14. ___ Alcohol can harm the brain's ability to sense pleasure from normal, healthy things and experiences.
15. ___ In Rhode Island, it is illegal for anyone to furnish or supply alcohol to a minor – punishable by a felony charge with up to \$2500 fine and 3 years in prison.

Answer Key
1. True, page 3; 2. False, page 6; 3. True, page 11; 4. True, page 11; 5. True, page 6; 6. True, page 8; 7. True, page 11; 8. True, page 6; 9. False, page 5; 10. True, page 6; 11. True, page 6; 12. True, page 6; 13. True, page 6; 14. True, page 5; 15. True, page 10

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES VISIT:
www.spcregionalpreventioncoalition.org



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK
facebook.com/SPCRegionalPreventionCoalition/



Tri-County Community Action Agency
Southern Providence County
Regional Coalition
Cranston • Johnston • North Providence • Scituate • Smithfield

It is **illegal** to give alcohol to a minor
It is **illegal** to use a fake ID to buy alcohol
.....
**Face up to \$1,000 in fines
and Jail Time**

