

Myth: Teen drinking is OK as long as they're not driving.

Reality: It's still illegal, so that counts as "not OK". Plus, drinking impairs judgment whether or not you're getting behind the wheel. Only 32% of teen drinking deaths are related to driving; 68% are related solely to other causes, from homicide to suicide to alcohol poisoning. Non-driving accidents are also quite common, and 1-10 teens who drown have been drinking alcohol.

Myth: All teens have an equal chance of becoming addicted to alcohol.

Reality: There is heredity to take into account; teens with alcoholism in their family should be especially careful. If any teen starts drinking in their early teens, they're at a greater risk of becoming an alcoholic than someone who starts drinking later on. A 14-year-old drinker has a 16% chance of becoming addicted, whereas a teen who starts drinking at 19 has a 1% chance because their brain is more developed.

Myth: Prom is a hotbed for teen drinking and debauchery.

Reality: Twice as many teens drink during summer break than at school-sponsored (and supervised) events such as prom or graduation. The most dangerous events are the unstructured ones without adult supervision.

Myth: Talk to your kids about drinking before they get their license.

Reality: Children start viewing alcohol more positively between the ages of 9 and 13, so nine is really the optimal age to start talking to them about underage drinking, which (you might mention) contributes to 4,700 deaths per year.

Myth: Statistics will scare teens into not driving drunk.

Reality: Telling a kid that they're 17 times more likely to die in a crash if there's alcohol involved is all well and good, but Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) research shows that tragic true stories, not statistics, successfully change minds and behaviors.

Myth: A drunk driver is a drunk driver is a drunk driver.

Reality: All drunk drivers are dangerous, but drivers under 26 cause the most auto fatalities, regardless of alcohol consumption. 21% of young drivers (a higher percentage than any other age group) involved in a fatal accident have some alcohol in their system.

Myth: Alcohol isn't as bad for teens as other drugs.

Reality: It's also the only cause of Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, commonly known as "wet brain," which essentially pickles the brain due to malnutrition. The mortality rate for late-stage "wet brain" is 20%, and people living with it can no longer walk steadily, think clearly, or take care of themselves.

Myth: It's easy to sober up after long periods of drinking.

Reality: Alcohol withdrawal often gets worse over time, and may persist for weeks. Withdrawal can be fatal, and is much more likely to cause death than withdrawal from less socially-accepted drugs such as heroin.

Myth: Teens are going to drive drunk; it's inevitable.

Reality: Teen drunk driving has decreased by 54% since 1991, and 90% of high school students don't drink and drive at all. Kids are, and should be, responsible for planning safe party transportation, and it's not "uncool" to be the designated driver.

Myth: Drinking is a rite of passage; parents can't do anything to prevent it.

Reality: According to a new study from SAMHSA, 1 in 5 parents believe that they have little say in his/her child's drug or alcohol use. The study showed children who believed their parents would disapprove of their behavior were less likely to use drugs or alcohol. Five percent of kids who believed their parents disapproved of marijuana smoked it anyway, and 80% of teens said their parents were the leading influence on whether or not they should drink. *Lesson learned: a little disapproval goes a long way.*

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