

What Happens To Kids When They Drink?

*SAFE Inc. remains committed to
ending underage drinking*

BY LAURA LANE, SAFE INC.

Just about every parent knows that underage drinking is harmful but most probably don't know how or why. And maybe they think just a drink here and there is no big deal. How could it be when so many kids drink?

SAFE Inc. is committed to getting the word out about the perils of underage drinking. The organization wants parents, children, and community members to know that underage drinking is a powerful problem and that it can be stopped with a little knowledge.

So what are the effects of drinking? Most people know that drinking slows down reactions, and causes poor coordination, but maybe that's funny to some teens. Do they also know that drinking can lower their heart rate, put them into a coma or cause their death from respiratory arrest?

A parent can educate their child by taking a few moments to share some of this information and the possible long-term health effects of drinking. That would include liver diseases, heart disease, strokes, brain cell death, cancer of the mouth, pharynx, esophagus, breast and pancreas to name a few. And it causes damage to the eyes and skin and possible sexual problems too.

There are signs that parents can look for if they suspect their child is drinking.

"When kids drink on a daily or even weekly basis they no longer want to follow through with everyday activities and lose interest in school, their jobs, and hobbies," said Robin Mead, a licensed social worker who is also SAFE's parent and life skills coordinator. "It changes their thought process and they have trouble focusing. Because they look forward to drinking, it becomes their number one priority. They focus on when will they get their next drink, when will they be able to drink with their friends and when is the next party."

At the SAFE, Inc. town hall meeting on April 26, the community learned the results of the Bach-Harrison Prevention Needs Assessment Survey, which had been administered by the Glen Cove School District to students in grades six, eight, 10, and 12 this past January. The survey, which assessed the use of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco and other drugs by Glen Cove youth, indicated that even though across the board there has been an increase in student's beliefs that alcohol is harmful, there is still a problem. The survey indicated that alcohol continues to be the substance of choice for Glen Cove's youth as sixth-graders are using alcohol earlier, from age 11 in 2010 to age 10 in 2012. This trend continues through the 8th and 10th grades. 12th graders said they began drinking at 14.

"Alcohol use has increased in the middle school and it's very easily accessible," said Mead. "I know they are cracking down on our stores but that isn't where the kids are getting it from. They are getting it in their own house or a friend's house and there doesn't even have to be a party going on."

Mead explained that some kids go over to a friend's house casually when they know the parents aren't home; a place where alcohol is accessible.

"Some people lock up their liquor cabinets but that doesn't mean a child won't take alcohol from another person's house where it is accessible," she added.

Here are a few more frightening statistics according to In The Know, an organization dedicated to educating the public on the dangers of alcohol:

- Alcohol kills 100,000 people a year.
- Thirty-two percent of incarcerated teens were drunk at the time of their crime and/or arrest.
- Alcohol use is involved in half of murders, accidental deaths, and suicides.
- Alcohol use is involved in a third of drowning, boating, and aviation deaths.

Glen Cove Police Sgt. Christopher Ortiz who assisted SAFE Director Sharon Harris and Georgie Connett, SAFE's board chair, in writing the Drug Sweep Grant proposal which SAFE obtained said there are additional indications that parents can look out for.

"Know where your kids are at all times and who they are with and know the parents too," he said. "Monitor your own alcohol in your house and make sure the kids aren't sneaking into your liquor cabinet which should be locked up. We do our part and the vast majority of our vendors in Glen Cove are responsible but if the kids can get it in their own homes enforcement will be more difficult."

SAFE Inc. is a not-for-profit tax exempt substance abuse education and prevention agency located in Glen Cove. Visit the website at www.safeglenecove.org or call 676-2008 for further information.