

Follow-up Activities

- In the 1960s and '70s, the American Medical Association suggested a legal Blood Alcohol Concentration limit of .15. With growing evidence that impairment begins with one drink and improved technology to measure alcohol concentration in the body, legal limits are now much lower. Some states have a zero tolerance law for teens, which means any percentage of alcohol in a teen driver's bloodstream will cause his or her license to be revoked, and result in fines of up to thousands of dollars. Have some students create posters showing the effects of blood alcohol levels on a user. Direct other students to research how laws have changed since the 1960s based on the dangers of alcohol and create posters illustrating the possible consequences of abuse.
- Discuss the fact that most teens do not use alcohol, and that many of those who do use it to take care of stressful feelings, avoid discomfort, or numb pain. What are some other ways to cope with the stresses presented in life?
- Studies have shown that a person's chances of abusing alcohol can increase based on the person's environment, including where and how he or she lives; family, friends, and culture; peer pressure; and even alcohol's availability. Have students create posters listing biological, psychological and social factors that can lead to abuse. Once these factors are "out in the open," brainstorm ways to resist and create accompanying posters.
- Why do people feel like they have to "experiment" with drugs and alcohol? List other things that teens can "experiment" with that are less dangerous.
- Invite a victim services coordinator from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), an officer from a state highway patrol or a substance abuse counselor to reiterate the fact that alcohol is a dangerous drug.

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our Web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.familydoctor.org/273.xml
This Web site contains an interactive version of a pamphlet designed to educate teens about drinking and the problems associated with alcohol.
- www.al-anon.org/alateen.html
Support group for teenagers who are affected by an alcoholic. The Web site provides literature, meeting information and an overview of the group's activities.

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- www.niaaa.nih.gov

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism is dedicated to providing alcohol and alcoholism information about the causes, effects, coping, medications, and treatment of this addiction.

- www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/students

This site contains an interactive program that shows how alcohol travels through the body, affecting virtually every organ system.

Suggested Print Resources

- Abraham, Henry D. *What's a Parent to Do?* New Horizon Press, East Rutherford, NJ; 2004.
- Gerdes, Louise. *Drunk Driving.* Greenhaven Press, San Diego, CA; 2001.
- Kuhn, Cynthia. *Buzzed: The Straight Dope About the Most Used and Abused Drugs from Alcohol to Ecstasy.* W.W. Norton & Company, New York, NY; 2003.
- Stewart, Gail. *Teen Alcobolics.* Lucent Books, San Diego, CA; 2000.

For help with a drug problem, call 1-800-662-HELP or go to:
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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COMPLETE LIST OF TITLES

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Teacher's Guides Included
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Executive Producer: Andrew Schlessinger

Program produced and directed by Center City Film & Video

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ALCOHOL: TEENAGE DRINKING

Grades 7 & up

Successful prevention education must empower teens to develop their own decision-making skills and assume responsibility for making choices that keep them healthy and safe. It is important to convey that most youths do not use drugs. In fact, smoking, drinking and other drug use has fallen among teens in recent years.

Nonetheless, drug related problems continue to devastate families and communities. Prepared with credible information, students develop an understanding of the risks involved in the use of any drug and learn that you don't have to be an addict for drugs to change your life.



Background

From music videos to advertising on billboards and on television, there is an image out there that makes drinking alcohol seem not only acceptable, but an easy way to be part of the “in” crowd. To drink or not to drink — it’s a decision many teenagers have to make at some point. There is no question that it can be a difficult decision and one that can shape the rest of one’s life.

Young people get the message in society that drinking is not really a big deal, that it’s a rite of passage, that everybody does it. The simple truth is that alcohol is a dangerous drug, and most teens do not drink. For those who do, drinking alcohol is not just for socializing, but to escape from serious psychological or emotional problems.

Education about the effects of drinking has changed the outlook of today’s teenagers and adults. But even with an awareness of the dangers of alcohol, the three leading causes of death for 15- to 24-year-olds are automobile crashes, homicides and suicides, and alcohol is a leading factor in all three.

Different beverages have varying amounts of alcohol and the alcohol is often masked by other components. (A 12 oz. can of beer has the same amount of alcohol as a shot of whiskey and a 5 oz. glass of wine.) Frozen fruit-flavored drinks, cocktails, wine coolers and gelatin ‘shooters’ all contain alcohol in varying amounts. Drinking to excess can happen quickly. Unaware of the dangers of alcohol, some young people ingest large amounts of alcohol at one time and drink very rapidly, which can also create dangerous overdoses of alcohol and lead to death. This is called binge drinking and is linked to reckless behavior, including date rape and unprotected sex.

Effects of Alcohol

Alcohol belongs to a class of drugs called depressants. Depressants are drugs that slow down the normal activity of the brain and spinal cord. (In other words, they “depress” the central nervous system.) Alcohol has been used throughout history to induce sleep, relieve stress and reduce anxiety. Generally, with limited dosage, alcohol acts as a stimulant. People feel a sense of euphoria and a loss of inhibition with one or two drinks. Beyond that amount, it generally depresses all the major body functions, leading to decreased attention, mood changes and drowsiness.

Drinking has varying effects on people. Physiologically, there are a number of factors that affect the body’s response to alcohol. The speed of consumption, the type of beverage consumed, a person’s body weight and gender, along with the amount of food in one’s stomach all have an impact on how a person will react to alcohol. Even when an individual drinks exactly the same amount of alcohol on two different occasions, the effects can be different.

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Alcohol acts directly on the brain and affects its ability to work. Judgment is the first function of the brain to be affected; the ability to think and make decisions becomes impaired. As more alcohol is consumed, the motor functions of the body are affected.

Drinking too much can cause lethargy, confusion, loss of motor control, amnesia, depressed breathing, and even death. Some signs of intoxication include slurred speech; stumbling or having difficulty maintaining balance and walking independently; trouble making eye contact; feeling excessively cold or warm; shortness of breath; erratic, withdrawn, or aggressive behavior; queasiness or vomiting; a tired stupor; unconsciousness.

Abusers of alcohol drink even when it threatens their health or well-being. They often suffer from denial — deciding not to recognize a problem as a problem. Their bodies adjust to the continuing, frequent presence of alcohol, resulting in the need to drink more and more to feel any effect. This is tolerance and is an indication of a developing problem because tolerance ultimately leads to addiction. Impaired judgment can cause abusers to make mistakes that affect them for the rest of your life. Dependence on alcohol and other drugs is also associated with psychiatric problems, such as depression and anxiety.

Someone addicted to alcohol has the disease of alcoholism and needs to drink. It has been estimated that over three million teenagers are alcoholics. Several million more have serious drinking problems that they cannot manage on their own.

Although some people are able to recover from alcoholism without help, the majority of alcoholics need assistance. With treatment and support, many individuals are able to stop drinking and rebuild their lives.

Focus Questions

1. Why do teens drink alcohol?
2. What are some factors that affect a person’s response to alcohol?
3. How much alcohol does it take to impact your mind and body?
4. How does alcohol change a person’s behavior?
5. What is binge drinking?
6. What are some dangers of alcohol abuse?
7. What are blackouts?
8. How many teens die every year due to alcohol-related car accidents?
9. How does a person become an alcoholic?

Vocabulary

addiction — A chronic, relapsing disease characterized by compulsive drug-seeking and abuse and by long-lasting chemical changes in the brain.

Alcoholics Anonymous — A well-known organized support program for alcoholics who want to stop drinking (www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/)

binge drinking — Drinking alcohol with the goal of getting intoxicated; drinking to get drunk.

blackouts — Periods of total or partial memory loss; an indication of a problem, or developing problem, with alcohol.

denial — Refusal to acknowledge painful realities, thoughts, or feelings.

depression — A condition of general emotional sadness and withdrawal.

hangover — Symptoms that occur in many people after heavy drinking in response to the buildup of poisons in the body. They can include severe headaches, nausea, vomiting, shaking/tremors, fatigue and diarrhea.

peer pressure — Influence by members of a group to accept certain beliefs or act in certain ways in order to be accepted.

psychological dependence — A craving or compulsion for repeated use of a drug despite any adverse effects that may occur.

tolerance — A process involving the body’s lessening response to a drug, making it necessary for users to take higher doses of the drug to achieve the same effects once reached with lower doses.

Discussion Topics

- Is experimenting with alcohol harmless? Why or why not?
- How is alcohol use portrayed in the media, such as television, movies, magazines, music, and the Internet?
- Discuss the many ways that drinking can create serious problems for teens.
- In peer discussion groups, have students share strategies for keeping themselves drug- and alcohol-free. How can you pick supportive friends who are not into drug use?
- Discuss what NOT to do: don’t drink (act responsibly if you do: eat a big meal and drink soda/water in between drinks if you do drink, know the alcohol content in what you drink, do not play drinking games); do not get into a car with someone who is driving; do not drink and drive yourself; seek help for a friend who is intoxicated.