



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition
Supported By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



June 2009 – Effect on Convictions on Careers

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Have you ever wished you could turn back time? Of course, we all have. Everyone makes choices they later regret. It's part of the grand learning experience we call life. But when those bad choices involve alcohol and drugs, turning back time may be the only way to escape a lifetime of searing consequences. Which is to say, of course, that those consequences cannot be escaped.

For teens and young adults, the long-term effects of today's choices can be hard to fathom. We try to raise their awareness by pointing out the immediate effects they risk by drinking or using drugs: getting sick, car accidents, risky sexual behavior, and the like.

Too often overlooked, though, are the risks of legal problems that can plague you for life if you end up in trouble with the law over alcohol and drugs, particularly when you are young. As an attorney working with family and juvenile issues, I see the fallout for many people. Rest assured, it is not pretty.

Get caught drinking or using drugs as a minor, and you will almost certainly end up in court for at least one appearance—maybe more. Your life will be thrust under a microscope as the probation department examines every aspect of your home, family and schooling. Your close relationship with the probation department will last months, if not years.

Perhaps even more daunting, though, is the potential for legal problems with drugs and alcohol to follow you through life and repeatedly get in your way. While some aspects of juvenile law allow records to be expunged, there is no guarantee that will be the result. And over-18 young adults are subject to the same laws and punishments as adults. Individuals in their late teens and early twenties sometimes behave with the cavalier attitudes as teenagers. When the red and blue flashing lights come on, though, they are treated as adults and face the same charges as those of us twice or thrice their age.

What kind of charges are we talking about? The obvious ones you've likely already thought of: driving under the influence; possession of alcohol as a minor; possession of drugs; carrying a false I.D. Consider also the potential for charges like furnishing alcohol to minors if you host a party, or disorderly conduct if your behavior gets out of control.

What's the worst that can happen, you ask? Plenty. Not only can convictions show up on a background check and turn off a potential employer or school admissions officer, but in some cases they may bar you from an entire career—forever.

Many professions, like mine, require licensure by the state. In Pennsylvania, the licensing requirements for attorneys, accountants, engineers, doctors, speech therapists and veterinarians—just to name a few—require “good moral character.” Yes, that’s an extremely vague standard. It gives the licensing board members plenty of leeway to turn you down. Don’t give them any help.

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