



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



October 14, 2009 – Teen Drinking and Protective Parenting

Caitlin Abar, M.S. is a Pre-doctoral Fellow in PSU's Department of Human Development and Family Studies. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

Recent studies out of the Penn State Prevention Research Center have shed light on parenting characteristics that may be more or less protective in terms of underage alcohol misuse and related negative consequences.

As a parent, it may be inconceivable that your college-bound teen would abuse alcohol or suffer related, harmful consequences once at school. Many parents are quick to tell themselves, "My kid doesn't drink", or, "My kid would never do that." It's important to remember, however, that 87% of college students will experiment with alcohol use and 45% will binge drink. At these rates, it's clear that alcohol use and abuse in college is a serious public health problem, as heavy drinking in college is associated with numerous serious health risks.

Each year, 1700 college students die from alcohol-related events. Approximately 600,000 students are unintentionally injured due to their own drinking; almost 700,000 are hit or assaulted by other drinking students; over 97,000 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault; and 25% of all college students report academic problems due to alcohol use.

That being said, research published by Caitlin Abar of the Prevention Research Center shows that there are several ways parents might protect their teens from experiencing negative consequences of drinking in college.

Ms. Abar examined the extent to which parental permissibility of high school alcohol use predicted college alcohol use and experienced negative consequences. Results indicated that a parents' permissive attitude toward alcohol use in high school was a risk factor for alcohol misuse and associated consequences in college. Parents who permitted relatively high levels of teen drinking in high school were more likely to have children who engaged in much riskier drinking behaviors in college than parents who permitted relatively low levels of teen drinking. Further, results showed that complete disapproval of underage use was more protective than approving of alcohol consumption at any level.

These findings stand in direct contradiction to recent pieces in the *NY Times* and *Time Magazine* supporting parental endorsement of alcohol use in the home. Proponents of the media created "European Drinking Model" believe that, by allowing their adolescents to drink in controlled environments, their teens will be more responsible drinkers in college. The current study found, instead, that parent permissibility was associated with greater drinking and experienced consequences for college teens than a strict policy of no underage use.

Other work by Ms. Abar suggested that parents may also protect their teens by influencing the type of friends they make in college. The more students reported their parents knowing and trying to know about their free

time usage in college, the less teens tended to associate with heavy drinking peers in college and the less they drank themselves.

Findings from Ms. Abar's work suggests that parents should work toward actively increasing parental knowledge and monitoring of teen behaviors, while voicing clear parental disapproval of underage alcohol use. This research shows that efforts of this kind during high school and as students transition to college will likely impact college behaviors.

Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care*
Serving State College Area School District
Dawn Taylor, Community Mobilizer, 814-237-6191
dtaylor105@gmail.com
Web address: carecentreregion.org

Centre County *Communities That Care*
Serving the School Districts of Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and
Philipsburg-Osceola
Elizabeth Eckley, Community Mobilizer, 814-404-9511
centrecountyctc@yahoo.com
Web address: centrecountyctc.org