



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



**December 30, 2009 – Holiday Drinking**

Dawn Taylor is the Community Mobilizer for Care Partnership Centre Region *Communities That Care*.

Holiday celebrations are rich in traditions that help children learn about family values and beliefs. Families that celebrate holidays together demonstrate to their children that they value spending time together. Holiday gatherings offer opportunities for family members to share their beliefs and teach children lessons about family values that they can carry with them into adulthood.

Families have different values and celebrate the holidays in different ways. Children who grow up in families where alcohol plays a large role in holiday get-togethers may grow up thinking that drinking is a key ingredient to having a good time. Children learn through observation and are influenced by examples set by family members as well as what parents actually tell them about drinking.

Research suggests that holidays may be one environmental factor that can increase risk or provide protection from alcoholism within families. Research reported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicates that alcoholism may be more harmful to family functioning and more likely to be passed to the next generation when drinking interferes with holidays and other family rituals. Conversely, carefully maintaining family rituals, even through years when a family member or members are engaging in heavy drinking, may help prevent alcoholism from being passed to future generations. Research also suggests that adult children may be at less risk for developing alcohol-related problems if their parents deliberately engage in family rituals.

In some homes, teens are allowed to drink on holidays. By condoning underage drinking during the holidays, parents risk giving a mixed message which may lead to confusion and a rationalization for drinking on other occasions: Sometimes it's OK to drink with my friends since sometimes it's OK to drink at home!

Research shows is that teens who are allowed to drink alcohol at home even if only on holidays or other special occasions are significantly more likely to drink with their friends. Here's what the data shows.

- Among high school teens, those who tend to avoid alcohol are more than twice as likely than those who repeatedly use alcohol to say their parents never let them drink at home (84 percent versus 40 percent).
- More than half (57 percent) of high school teens who report their parents allow them to drink at home, even once in a while, say they drink with their friends, as compared to just 14 percent of teens who say their parents don't let them drink.

The holiday season offers an excellent opportunity to for family members—parents, grandparents, aunts, uncle, cousins--to talk to children in about drinking. Families who talk with their children about underage drinking, set clear expectations for behavior, and enforce consequences for violating the rules are significantly less likely to have children who use alcohol. A clear family stance on underage drinking will provide young people in your family with unambiguous, common sense guidelines they can use to make safe, healthy choices all year long.

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