



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



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Attitudes Regarding Underage Drinking/July 4th Holiday

Dawn Taylor is the Community Mobilizer for Care Partnership: Centre County *Communities That Care*®. 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.

Happy Valley is the place to be on the 4th of July. In addition to having what is surely the best fireworks display in the country, there will be plenty of celebrating going on. That makes it a prime time for parents and other caring adults to discuss the dangers of underage drinking.

Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration shows this to be one of the deadliest holiday periods of the year due to impaired driving. Last year, nearly 55 percent of all fatalities on the nation's roads over the July 4th weekend were alcohol-related.

Youth are more likely to engage in risky behaviors in the summer months when they have larger amounts of unmonitored free time. Data provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) shows that the highest occurrence of first-time alcohol use (13.1%) takes place during July. According to SAMHSA, "Alcohol affects how well a young person judges risk and makes sound decisions." Underage drinking puts young people at risk of endangering themselves and others.

While most 6 year olds know that alcohol is only for adults, between the ages of 9 and 13 years of age, youth's perceptions change. The average age when children here in Centre County have their first drink is 12.6 years, and alcohol use increases rapidly with age. Nationally, about 10 percent of 12 years olds say they have used alcohol at least once. By age 13 that number doubles and by age 15, approximately 50 percent have had at least one drink (SAMHSA). Local Pennsylvania Youth Survey data (2005) shows that about 5.4 percent of seventh graders and 43.7 percent of high school seniors report using alcohol in the past 30 days.

Families can help prevent underage drinking and the dangers that accompany it. Teens say that parents are the number one influence in their lives, and parental disapproval is the primary reason they give for not using alcohol.

Help protect your children by talking about the dangers of underage drinking in advance of the July 4th holiday and throughout the year. Monitor your children. Make it clear that you disapprove of underage drinking. Tell them that you do not want them getting into a car with someone who has had even one drink. Assure them that they can call you if they need a safe ride home. Reinforce that underage drinking is against the law--period.

Kids learn by example. Be a good role model and don't send mixed messages. If you have been drinking, don't drive.

A community that opposes underage drinking can help change how people think, talk, and act. But it takes the involvement of everyone, and it means sending a clear, consistent community message that underage drinking is not acceptable.

Stop by our table at the Bruce Jordan Center Founders Mall at the Central Pennsylvania 4th Fest and find out more about *Communities That Care*® and how together we can nurture local youth and help change attitudes about underage drinking in our community.

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