

## **Teen drinking & driving is highest during July & August** **by Steve Danzig, LMSW-CC, LADC, CCS**

June 15<sup>th</sup> officially starts the summer season and that means increased teen drinking. This month, AAA released a study that found that the summer months can be deadly for teen drivers. Of the 6,000 fatal car crashes per year involving drivers 16-21 years old, the highest percentage of those crashes occur in July and August. What a terrifying combination!

Like scary statistics?

- Every 22 minutes someone dies in an alcohol-related motor vehicle accident.
- On any given weekend evening, 1 in 10 drivers on America's roads has been drinking.
- One out of 10 children ages 12 and 13 uses alcohol at least once a month.
- 70% of all teenagers drink alcohol.
- 60% of all teen deaths in car accidents are alcohol-related.
- According to AAA, in a single year, 522 children under age 14 were arrested for driving while intoxicated, (113 of them were under 10 years old).

Why are teenagers drinking & driving?

It's hard to say. There are several explanations for the disproportionately high numbers of teenage alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents - explanations that range from the false notion on "teenage invincibility" to the increase in personal freedoms (i.e. reaching the legal ages for driving and later, for drinking). For some, letting or encouraging an intoxicated person to drive seems funny. And, of course, there's the "I can handle it" syndrome, where the person figures they can "hold" their liquor or that they haven't had enough to seriously impair them. Few people realize the effect a mere drink or two can have on their system. For instance, teenage boys with a Blood Alcohol Level ("BAL") of .05-.10 are a staggering 18 times more likely to suffer a single vehicle crash than their non-drinking counterparts. Teenage girls at the same levels are an incredible 54 times more likely to crash. FYI, Maine's legal limit is .08 BAL for people 21 years old and over. For anyone under 21 years old, the legal Blood Alcohol Level limit is ZERO!!!

How do you stop your teens from drinking & driving?

The best way to prevent your teen from drinking and driving is teach your children about the dangers. Explain to them that you don't have to be "legally drunk or a .08 BAL in Maine" to be seriously impaired. In addition, communicate and reinforce your expectations about their behavior. Lastly, convince them that they can always call you "no matter what" to come get them. And as always, if you suspect that your teen has a drinking problem, schedule an assessment with a licensed alcohol and drug counselor ("LADC") to begin the treatment process.

One last statistic:

As a drinking driver, you're four times more likely to crash and be killed or injured than you are to be arrested for exceeding the legal limits of O.U.I. So if you're concerned about being caught driving drunk, think again ... there's an even better chance you might be caught dead.

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