

‘Tis the season for increased teen alcohol use
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According to statistics published by the Maine Office of Substance Abuse, the number of teenagers using alcohol for the first time is among the highest in the months of December and January. Perhaps this is because parents are caught up in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season preparations and therefore aren't keeping as close an eye on their teens. Perhaps it is because families have more alcohol in the house for their holiday entertaining making it easily accessible to their teens. Perhaps it is because teens have a long school vacation with more free unscheduled time on their hands when they can more easily get into "trouble". Or perhaps it is a combination of ALL of the above reasons. Who knows? Why these are the higher risk months is unimportant. What is important is that you be aware that once a teen has tried drinking, they are more likely to do so again, especially if no negative side effects were experienced during their first try.

Unfortunately, the statistics also tell us that parents are often unaware of when their teen is using alcohol. In 2002, 65% of teens reported using alcohol in their lifetime but only 17% of their parents thought their teens had ever engaged in that type of behavior. Furthermore, when asked about their recent use, 38% of teens said they drank in the past month while only 2% of their parents thought that they did.

So now that you know your teens are at greater risk for drinking in the next few months, you are probably wondering how you will know if they are. Here are a few tips:

- Ask your children where they are going, who they will be with, and what their plans are. Most importantly, don't be afraid to check up on what they tell you.
- Be suspicious of subtle changes in behavior such as sleeping, eating, change of friends, and/or elaborating on details of their activities that seem insignificant.
- If you suspect your son or daughter has been drinking, **ask them**. Surprisingly, many kids will tell the truth when asked directly. If you suspect your teen is lying about their alcohol consumption, it may mean that they are simply avoiding a lecture/being grounded from you but it could also mean that they are trying to hide a very real problem. Trust your parental instincts and know that there are therapists specializing in alcohol/drug counseling that can help you and your family with this issue.

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