

Alcohol Awareness Month was established in April of 1987 and has been sponsored by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD). This year, the focus of this awareness is directed toward the issue of underage drinking. This public health issue has devastating consequences for the individual, family and community. Awareness and encouragement to seek help for alcohol-related problems are the highlights of this monthly awareness.

Alcohol use by anyone is potentially very dangerous. However, alcohol use by young people is by far most dangerous. Young people tend to engage in more risky behavior when they are under the influence of alcohol. Traffic fatalities, violence, suicide, alcohol overdose, educational failure, unsafe intercourse and other problem behaviors increase with alcohol intake among youth.

According to NCADD:

- Alcohol is the number one drug of choice for America's young people, and is more likely to kill young people than all illegal drugs combined.
- Each day, 7,000 kids in the United States under the age of 16 take their first drink of alcohol.
- Those who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcoholism than those who begin at age 21.
- More than 1,700 college students in the U.S are killed each year-about 4.65 a day- as a result of alcohol-related injuries.
- 25% of U.S. children are exposed to alcohol-use disorders in their family.
- Underage alcohol use costs the nation an estimated \$62 billion annually.

Research has shown that the longer an individual abstains from alcohol use, the less likely they are to develop an addiction. Parents should not be afraid to be labeled a "bad parent" by their kids. Monitoring the activities of children and teenagers is essential to keeping them drug free. Being a good role model for children is just as important because kids learn so much from watching parental behaviors. The most common source of alcohol is parents. Parents should monitor the alcohol in their home closely to be sure they do not become a source for children.

For those soon to be mothers, no amount of alcohol is safe to drink while pregnant. Exposing a developing fetus to any amount of alcohol can cause a wide range of problems. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is a general term to describe the many issues that can occur to the baby if the pregnant mother drinks during pregnancy. These issues can include physical, intellectual, behavioral and developmental problems. According to The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), almost one in five pregnant women drinks alcohol early in pregnancy and some continue to drink throughout pregnancy. These statistics are disappointing given the fact that FASD is completely preventable simply by women not drinking any amount of alcohol during pregnancy.

It is always best to consult a physician if alcohol or drug abuse is suspected. If you would like to learn more about keeping your baby or teen safe, visit www.healthychildren.org for more reliable information.