

**Preventing Underage Drinking: Success over a Sip**

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**Introduction:**

In 2018, Alabama police charged and arrested a Prattville teen for murder after he crashed into a young woman with his car while recklessly driving under the influence of alcohol (Roney 2018). In 2023, twenty Alabama minors used fake IDs to illegally consume alcohol, and as a result, were arrested and labelled “criminals” as highschoolers (Baker 2023). In 2024, an 18 year old Huntsville teen faced criminal charges due to her connections with an alcohol-induced single-car wreck that left three teens hospitalized and a 13 year old dead (Koplowitz 2024). Normally, one would assume highschoolers should bring report cards home from school, not a criminal record marred by underage drinking, which in some cases, end with the permanent demise of innocent lives. As seen from these three instances from Alabama, the national issue of underage consumption of alcohol, which involves nearly 10.8 million US youth, plays a drastic role in destroying multiple highschoolers’ lives (HHS 2007). Too many dreams have been drowned by the poison of underage drinking, so it is crucial that a cap be put on this problem now in order to ensure highschoolers current and future wellbeing. In order to safeguard the succeeding generations’ mental and physical health, decrease juvenile delinquency, and foster a more prosperous future it is imperative that society works together to prevent the under-age consumption of alcohol.

**Mental & Physical Health:**

In order to help contribute towards the community, an individual must take care of their own mental and physical health first. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), the main causes of underage drinking are due to adolescents feeling social pressure, peer pressure or

stress by who and what surrounds them. Often, adolescents choose to drink because they want to gain independence, acceptance by their peers, or they use alcohol as a method to cope with depression or anxiety (HHS 2007) (NIAAA 2025). However, making a reckless decision that may seem “grown-up” at the moment is not worth the risk of losing one’s entire adulthood to prison or dangerous health issues. According to the Center of Disease Control (CDC), underage drinking kills around “4,000 young people (under 21)” each year (“About Underage Drinking” 2025). Those are four thousand lost lives of individuals who could have been doctors, lawyers, teachers and other leaders who could have contributed to the community. Alas, not only their futures, but their dreams die along with them. Even though drinking underage may not always directly lead to death, it can lead to hazardous health problems. Excessive drinking especially hurts minors because their bodies are still growing, and alcohol can cause their bodies to develop irregularly. Alcohol can hurt the body’s vital organs, such as the heart and liver by making the body more susceptible to cancers and diseases. Recent research also shows correlations between drinking and stilted brain development, increased memory loss, trouble focusing, difficulty in socializing or problem solving, and faulty decision-making among minors. Along with causing physical impairments, drinking can worsen the same mental issues a teen may have tried to heal with alcohol, such as anxiety or depression, because alcohol can damage the the body’s central nervous system and cause teens to feel increased “hopelessness” or “suicidal thoughts” (Bonnie 2004)(Davis 2024). A lifetime of illnesses and adversity is not worth a small moment of “acceptance” or temporary peace.

### **Juvenile Delinquency and Consequences of Under-age Drinking:**

Decision-making is a key factor in determining whether one's fate will follow a prosperous or demeaning path. Studies show that drinking irresponsibly underage can impair decision making or judgement (NIAAA 2025). Since drinking can induce risky behavior, it can lead minors to make decisions that involve decreased academic success, homicidal, suicidal, or sexual violence or driving while intoxicated, which not only puts them in danger, but those who surround them too. Underage drinking hinders adolescents from focusing during school, which can lead to lower grades and more absences. Along with in school, alcohol affects minors' social life and can lead to risky sexual behavior. According to the National Library of Medicine (NIH), "more than 70,000 students aged 18 to 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault", and are less inclined to use protection, which can lead to unplanned pregnancies or the spread of STIs, namely HIV. Alongside sexual violence, underage drinking can also encourage motor violence by inducing adolescents to drive drunk, which increases their chances of causing a wreck. Sixty-nine percent of youths who die in alcohol-influenced motor accidents involve young drinking drivers (Bonnie 2004). When teens start to drink underage, they become more susceptible to becoming alcoholics as adults. The number one drug teens are addicted to, even more than vaping, is alcohol. This addictive practice can continue once a teen enters adulthood, which can cause the cyclical pattern of alcoholism to continue in their progeny because children are four times more likely to drink alcohol if their parents binge-drink ("About Underage Drinking" 2025). In order to decrease actions that involve juvenile delinquency and the threat of being incarcerated, it is imperative that the adolescents learn about the dangers of underage drinking so they can break the merciless cycle of alcoholism, and find healthier ways to cope with adversity.

## **Preventing Underage Drinking**

Communication about alternate ways to solving mental and social issues and proper role-modeling can help guide adolescents away from alcohol and gesture them towards a more permanent healthy and happy life. Communication should begin within families, so teens feel safe to discuss problems at home, and can rely on their parents and siblings to help them cope with mental and social issues. If that is not enough, teens can attend therapy instead of using alcohol to cope. If parents do not drink at home, their children will feel less inclined to start drinking. Parents should also pay attention to their teens behavior so they can notice any actions that hint their children may be drinking underage, and can deter that behavior. Harming oneself does not help the process to heal. Also, it is important that teens are aware of the consequence of underage drinking. Schools, places of worship, sports programs, youth programs, and numerous places teens go should raise awareness about the dangers of underage drinking (HHS 2007). Teens should be in environments where they are aware about the dangers of drinking, so they can defend themselves against peer pressure, and encourage their peers to steer clear of the bottle. Along with individual, familial, and social limitations, certain policies can be passed by the government to deter underage drinking, such as raising the price of alcohol, mandatory school programs that inform about the harms of underage drinking, or making it illegal to consume any amount of alcohol before driving (NIAAA 2025).

## **Conclusion:**

Every problem has an answer, but in order to solve the problem, it must be addressed. Currently, underage drinking impacts the lives of over 10.8 million US teens by affecting their mental health, physical health, and decision making (HHS 2007). Teens need to be informed by

their parents, teachers, and anti-alcohol programs about the harms of underage drinking, so they feel less inclined to involve themselves in alcohol. This would decrease health issues, such as cancer, STIs, or depressions, and lower an adolescent's chance of continuing the cycle of alcoholism to their progeny. Starting in Alabama, anti-alcoholic programs and state reforms can be passed in order to enact this change, and can spread nationally. Every person deserves a bright future and endless success, so it is important to not let that all end because of a sip.

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