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Commentary: Parents Need to Make Clear to Teens That Drinking Is Unacceptable

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Categories : [Healthy Living](#), [Opinion](#), [Parents & Kids](#), [Teens](#)

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The team of psychologists, therapists, and educators at the Southfield Center applaud the public health campaign initiated by the Thriving Youth Task Force of The Community Fund of Darien.

— [Dr. Frank Bartolomeo, Ph.D](#) is director of behavioral health services at [Southfield Center for Development](#) in Darien and a member of the [Thriving Youth Task Force](#). All images and links on this page were added by [Darienite.com](#). A [presentation for teenagers and parents](#) on the consequences of teen drinking is scheduled for 7 p.m., Tuesday at Darien High School Auditorium.

By any measure, binge drinking during adolescence is a serious public health concern with both immediate and serious consequences for teenagers and their families and with long-term costs to our society.

Neuroscientific research over the last 10 years has conclusively demonstrated that alcohol not only affects the developing adolescent brain differently from an adult brain, but can interfere with normal brain functioning.

Supporting this finding are these facts: 9 out of 10 people who abuse or are addicted to nicotine, alcohol, or other drugs began using these substances before they were 18 and that the risk of addiction decreases each year that substance use is delayed during the period of adolescent brain development (fully completed by approximately age 25).

Factors that initiate and perpetuate teen drinking are social norms, including parental attitudes and beliefs that alcohol consumption during adolescence is normative and expected.

Analogous to our former erroneous acceptance of cigarette smoking, this acceptance of alcohol consumption in adolescence is dangerous. Furthermore, a dramatic shift in public attitudes and understanding will be critical to prevention.

As a practitioner, I have never heard a parent excuse cigarette smoking as “normal experimentation” or as an expected rite of passage. Many teenagers and college students regard alcohol consumption as a right or even an entitlement.

Unlike cigarette smoking, there has been no historical suppression of the science that clearly demonstrates the immediate dangers, long term negative health implications, and societal costs of alcohol use during adolescence.

The research, however, on the acute and long term consequences of underage drinking has yet to be sufficiently disseminated and integrated into our public consciousness.

The Thriving Youth campaign seeks to fill the gap between scientific knowledge and popular opinion by raising consciousness about the risks associated with underage drinking and the integral role that parents can play in teens’ decisions to drink (or not to drink) alcohol.

Studies have repeatedly shown that parents’ attitude towards drinking often predicts if their children will drink.

I have not met many parents who gave their teens overt permission to drink alcohol, although it could be argued that the willingness to host teen parties where drinking is involved is a form of encouragement.

See also: [The Thriving Youth Task Force's micro-website OurDarien.com](#).

More often than not, parents give ambiguous messages to their teens such as “I do not want you to drink, but just tell me if you do so,” or “I would rather have you drink in the house than go out to parties and drink.”

In exchange for honesty and transparency, these parents inadvertently forfeit their ability to discipline or impose restrictions when their teenagers use or abuse alcohol.

These same parents are often in a bind when the drinking, in their opinion, becomes excessive. What ensues is a ponderous debate about how much is too much.

I have rarely met a teenager who did not interpret an ambiguous message about drinking as tacit permission to do so, or at least unspoken tolerance for underage drinking

The Thriving Youth program of [The Community Fund of Darien](#) is taking a bold and courageous step toward changing public attitudes and beliefs about underage drinking.

Instead of taking the well-worn approach of focusing exclusively on teenagers, the campaign is also focused on parents and other adults who have directly and indirectly communicated permissive or ambiguous attitudes about underage drinking — attitudes that were generally formed during their own teenage years and then carried forward.

It is time that we adults hold our implicit beliefs about underage drinking up to the science that did not exist in our youth.

Drinking alcohol, like cigarette smoking, during the teen years dramatically increases the risk for addiction and long term health problems.

This campaign is a critical and audacious step in the right direction.

SIDEBAR from Darienite.com:

See also:

- [GreenwichFreePress.com: Pink & White Dance Shut Down at Arch Street Teen Center after Teens Arrive Intoxicated](#) (Feb. 6, about an event last Saturday)
- [Group Launches Campaign to Counter Darien's 'Troubling Rate of Teenage Binge Drinking'](#) (Feb. 2)
- [DRINKING IN DARIEN: Worse than Elsewhere for Both Teens and Adults — and the Problem is Growing](#) (Jan. 30)
- [Teenage Party with Beer Broken Up: One Teen Charged](#) (Dec. 13, 2016)
- [NEW COLUMN: Advice from a Lawyer: Parents, Know Your Teen Party Responsibilities](#) (Nov. 22)

Darien's Teenage Drinking Parties in 2016

Articles on teenage drinking at parties last year:

- [Police: Teenage Party with Five 30-Packs of Cold Beer at Brookside Road Home](#) (Nov. 28)
- [Mansfield Ave House Damaged During Large Teen Party with Lots of Alcohol](#) (Nov. 7)
- [Darien Boy, 15, Taken to Hospital After Drinking Party on Bishop's Gate Road](#) (Nov. 1)
- [Police: Host, 19, Arrested After Teen Drinking Party on Althea Lane](#) (June 27)
- [Host Charged After Police Alerted to Teen Drinking Party on Swifts Lane](#) (May 23)
- [Police: Teenage Host Charged After Underage Party with Alcohol](#) (April 4)
- [Post-Season Penalty for Hockey Player Accused of Hosting Party with Alcohol?](#) (March 28)
- [Cops: Darien Parents, Upstairs, Charged After Teens Party with Alcohol Downstairs](#) (Feb. 29)

Other 2016 Articles About Teenage Drinking in Darien

- [UPDATE: Two Drunk Teens, Other Misbehavior Among Fans Noted at High School Game](#) (May 5)
- [More Information on Report of Drunk Female Teen Amid May Day Misbehavior at Lax Game](#) (May 9)
- [Teens Caught Drinking May Get Education Program Rather Than Charges, Police Chief Says](#) (April 28)

