

Thriving Youth Task Force Announces 'Our Darien 2.0' Campaign

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The Town of Darien is above par on many indicators of success. When it comes to parenting, we excel at providing our children with every opportunity to nurture their potential.

We feed them organic whole foods, we limit sugar intake, sign them up for tutoring, encourage stimulating extra-curricular activities, and make sure they get enough sleep at night.

— *This is an announcement from Darien's Thriving Youth Task Force, an Initiative of The Community Fund of Darien. Darienite has added images from the [OurDarien.com website](#). (The images are not necessarily the one's you'll be seeing in the task force's upcoming campaign.)*

However, there is one area where many of us are unwittingly stunting our kids' health and brain development. We allow them to drink alcohol, or turn a "blind eye" to their partying. We allow them to drink under the assumption that it is just a little, relatively harmless "social" drinking or that they need to learn how to handle alcohol before they go to college.

The reality is that for most teens, any and all drinking is binge drinking. Connecticut's latest student survey data indicates that 30 percent of 9-12th graders had consumed alcohol in the past 30 days. Darien's 9-12th graders? 45 percent.

Why aren't we as diligent about alcohol use as we are about their academics, eating and sleeping habits?

Alcohol is a neurotoxin. Early alcohol introduction causes profound damage to the teen brain. The legal consequences of serving minors or failing to stop teen alcohol use are significant.

Let's start with some facts:

- 25.6 percent of our 12th graders reported having had alcohol more than 6 times in the previous 30 days.
- Only 49.1 percent of Darien 7 to 12th graders responded their parents would believe it is "very wrong" for them to consume one to two drinks daily. This figure is 34 percent lower than Connecticut towns with similar demographics, suggesting that Darien parents may be significantly more permissive about their teens using alcohol.
- Only 36.2 percent of Darien 7 to 12th graders believe a peer using alcohol daily would be at great risk.
- Key areas of the adolescent brain are not fully formed until the mid-twenties and damage done before the mid-twenties can be irreversible.

- 90 percent of adults with alcohol or drug addiction began using before age 18.

Entering its second year, the “Our Darien” campaign is aimed at providing teens and parents with the facts about underage drinking.

This campaign aims to shine a spotlight on the impact of alcohol on the teen brain, the legal consequences of consuming alcohol underage or serving minors, and the growing body of research that shows an ongoing parent-child dialogue about risky behaviors, as well as clear rules and consequences, equips students up to make healthy choices in the short and long term.

Let’s continue the conversation about teen binge drinking in Darien. Now is the time to re-examine your household rules, behaviors and attitudes about alcohol.

Since the release of the first “Our Darien” campaign in February 2017, important partnerships have been formed to promote the latest research on the impact of alcohol on the teen brain, as well as the legal consequences for hosting underage parties in a private residence.

Darien High School has created an innovative program to educate Darien teens and parents alike about the truth and consequences of teen substance use.

The Darien Police Department has implemented a “Juvenile Review Board” aimed at responding with greater effectiveness to the incidents of teen drinking in Darien.

Now is a critical time to continue this conversation.

We hope you will join us in support of this campaign. We are committed to turning this trend around and giving parents and teens the information and resources to make an informed decision about underage drinking.

In the weeks to come you will see social media messages targeting underage binge drinking, as well as posters and postcards around town and in your mailbox. Let’s work together to keep our teens safe and healthy.