

Dr. Lipoff: Underage Drinking

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"First you take a drink, then the drink takes a drink, then the drink takes you."

- F. Scott Fitzgerald

As parents we try to teach our kids the lessons we have learned in life. Things like be nice to others, never give up, think things through before you act, don't run with scissors, be aware of your surroundings and hopefully that all men and women are created equal and deserve respect and an opportunity to become successful.

Protecting our kids from harm becomes more and more difficult as they grow older and "know it all." They think they are adults when they are actually still just impressionable and vulnerable big kids. My six year old has been telling me "he knows" for years. Yeah right.

Some of the difficult discussions that have to be addressed with your child are a few of the previously mentioned ones, but also underage drinking.

Children learn traits from our actions. They watch us interact as couples, argue, drink, smoke drive, swear at other drivers and more. Sometimes our actions are definitely stronger than words.

Many children/young adults have left for college or are seniors now and this is when you need to be upfront with your kids. Underage drinking is a problem and the thought of losing a child so young is devastating.

As part of the Foundation 4 Heroes, we visit children battling Cancer and other horrible diseases and it is tough knowing their future is unknown. It's the reason we visit the kids; to make a difference. Especially being so fortunate to have healthy children ourselves.

While living in NY I knew someone whose son and friend, after a few drinks, went on a trail ride with their vehicle near a quarry while ignoring the no trespassing signs. They had bounced around on this piece of property days before but had no idea the quarry blasted another 40 feet of land. They plummeted 60 feet to their deaths after just finishing their senior year.

That is tough to recover from as a family. I don't even know how they made it through. It was a year after this tragedy when I first saw them and they were still very much struggling to hold it together.

Research has found kids who drink before the age of 15 are more likely to develop alcohol related problems later in life than if they started after turning 21.

Again our kids will try to convince us they know what they are doing when they drink but do they? NO!

The CDC website reports that the consequences of underage drinking include:

- School problems, such as higher absence and poor or failing grades.

- Social problems, such as fighting and lack of participation in youth activities.
- Legal problems, such as arrest for driving or physically hurting someone while drunk.
- Physical problems, such as hangovers or illnesses.
- Unwanted, unplanned, and unprotected sexual activity.
- Disruption of normal growth and sexual development.
- Physical and sexual assault.
- Higher risk for suicide and homicide.
- Alcohol-related car crashes and other unintentional injuries, such as burns, falls, and drowning.
- Memory problems.
- Abuse of other drugs.
- Changes in brain development that may have life-long effects.
- Death from alcohol poisoning.

In a CDC study of Youth Risk Behavior in 2011, they found that in the last 30 days:

- 39% drank some amount of alcohol.
- 22% binge drank.
- 8% drove after drinking alcohol.

- 24% rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.

In Maryland, specifically students in grades 9 – 12, the CDC reported:

- There are almost 225,000 underage drinkers in Maryland each year.
- 67.2% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 24.5% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 37.0% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasion in the past 30 days.
- 19.4% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (binge drinking) in the past 30 days.
- 4.8% had at least one drink of alcohol on school property in the past 30 days.

If you think your child isn't, it might prove worthwhile to remove some trust and keep a closer eye on them. It may be their room, but it's your house. As a parent you have every right to investigate their phone, computer, facebook page and drawers to keep them safe.

We know that drinking impairs our driving skills as adults but in our inexperienced youth the effects can be much worse. In 2010, underage drinking accidents cost Marylanders over 1.3 billion according to a study by DT Levy. Roughly 787 million was for pain and suffering, 396 million due to lost work production from an injured employee and 125 million in medical costs.

- Talk to your kids
- Ask them to leave if there is alcohol at a party
- Ask them to call you if they have had any alcohol
- Teach them to NEVER get in a vehicle with someone under the influence
- Tell them to sleep in their non-running vehicle if they've been drinking
- Get a room or stay at the family's house

- Call you when they arrive and leave
- Keep you informed

Teach them now because there will be greater exposure to drugs and alcohol at college without any parental guidance.

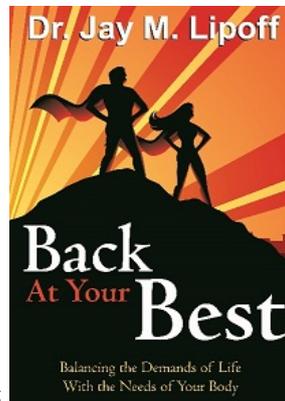
[The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) estimated 1,400 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 will die from alcohol-related incidents each year. One of those was Sam Spady, who had everything going for her before she died from alcohol poisoning her first year at school. Now the family tries to help educate others so no one else has to live with this type of pain.

Some places to find out more facts and solutions are:

[The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) Underage Drinking Prevention](#)

[CDC.gov](#)

[The Century Council](#)



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