

Parents Who Host Lose the Most: Don't Be a Party to Underage Drinking

In 2006, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reported that one-third of teenagers have attended parties in which parents were present and substance use by teens occurred, including alcohol use and use of illegal drugs.¹ Recent surveys (2006 and 2007) of Ohio parents and their 13 to 18 year old teens found that approximately 30% of both parents and teens know of parents who host parties where alcohol is available and/or served to teens. While this practice has declined somewhat since 2001, it remains a significant public health, safety, and legal problem. Ohio teens continue to have easy access to alcohol through multiple sources, including friends, parents, other adults, or business establishments.²

Responding to this situation during the spring of 2000, the Drug Free Action Alliance,³ a private, statewide, nonprofit agency, began a statewide media campaign, *Parents Who Host Lose The Most*, to reduce one source of underage drinking: parties where parents provide alcohol to teenagers. A major goal of the campaign was to educate parents or guardians about Ohio's underage drinking laws and the legal consequences of violating those laws. For instance, Ohio law states that alcohol cannot be given to or permitted to be consumed by underage persons except by their parents who are present at the time of consumption. Also, it is illegal for parents to give alcohol to their teen's underage friends even with their parent's permission. Parents and other adults can be sued if they give alcohol to anyone under age 21 who then hurt themselves or someone else and/or damage someone's property. Finally, parents and other adults can face a maximum sentence of six months in jail and/or a \$1,000 fine for breaking these laws. However, most Ohio adults are unaware of or uninformed about the legal consequences of supplying alcohol to minors or allowing them to drink.

Between 2001 and 2006, survey data collected from over 8,000 parents in Franklin County, Ohio show that knowledge about those laws is gradually improving. While 32% of parents surveyed had an excellent knowledge of such laws in 2001, that percentage increased to 40% in 2006 (Figure 1). In contrast, a majority of respondents had "good" or "average" knowledge of laws. Consequently, while knowledge of Ohio's underage drinking laws is improving, a significant majority of adults surveyed have less than an "excellent" knowledge of them (Seufert et al., 2002 through 2007). This lack of knowledge contributes to an adult's willingness to put themselves at risk as well as the minors to whom alcohol is supplied.

Figure 1 Parent Knowledge of Ohio's Underage Drinking Laws



In summary, although alcohol use by underage persons is illegal, society's view of moderate drinking is generally tolerant. This situation, combined with permissive subjective norms toward drinking, lack of parental awareness and strict law enforcement, the presence of appealing alcohol advertisements, and individual problems such as stress and depression, often leads to an environment where alcohol use is normal, comfortable, and easily accessible for adolescents. Therefore, underage drinking, particularly heavy drinking, can continue into college and is reinforced by peer alcohol use.⁴ Addressing this problem, the *Parents Who Host Lose The Most* public information and education campaign is designed to decrease underage drinking among the

target population of Ohio's teenage youth by informing parents, other adults, and youth that hosting teen drinking parties should not be regarded as a "rite of passage," but as a serious health and safety problem with significant legal ramifications.

¹ National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (2006). *National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XI: Teens and Parents*. New York: Columbia University.

² Seufert, Robert L. et al., (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). *Parents Who Host Lose The Most, Final Evaluation Report*. Ohio, Miami University

³ Until 2005, the Drug Free Action Alliance was named Ohio Parents for Drug Free Youth (OPDFY).

⁴ Sher, K. J. & Rutledge, P. C. (2007). Heavy drinking across the transition to college: Predicting first-semester heavy drinking from precollege variables. *Addictive Behaviors*, 32, 819-835; Feldman, L., Harvey, B., Holowaty, P., & Shortt, L. (1999). Alcohol use beliefs and behaviors among high school students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 24, 48-58.