



Parents Can Make the Difference

By Marilyn Belmonte, Executive Director, Healthy Outcomes, Inc. for Tri-Town Council

Think teens aren't listening? Think again. With warmer weather on our doorstep, summer approaching, older siblings returning from college, prom, graduation, and all that goes with this time of year, parents need to remember that they are still the most prominent voice in their children's minds (even if that is hard to believe most days). Many studies have shown that parents are the greatest weapon against teen drug and alcohol abuse, but few parents are aware of the mountain of research that supports parental involvement in the adolescent years. Parents who closely monitor their teen's behavior can help counteract even a child's genetic disposition to an alcohol disorder. According to a report in "Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research", teens with a difference in their genes are more susceptible to alcohol dependency. But the risk of addiction can be reduced by parental monitoring and involvement during adolescence. A lead researcher, Robert Miranda of Brown University, explains, "The key finding of this study is that while genetics appear to play a role in the development of alcohol problems among teenagers, environmental factors can considerably reduce this risk."

Further, John F. Kelly, Associate Director of Mass General Hospital-Harvard Center for Addiction Medicine states, "If you are a parent, pay closer attention to your child's whereabouts, and with whom your kids are affiliating with socially, both of which can pay enormous dividends in reducing problems."

Another study published in the "Journal of the Studies of Alcohol and Drugs" showed that parents who set rules and enforce rules on curfews, studying, as well as risky behaviors, had less teen drug and alcohol use. Parents who monitor their children's whereabouts, and meet the parents of the children's friends also had less risk of teen substance abuse. For

daughters, a permissive father was linked to more alcohol-related problems though lower levels of monitoring by fathers. But daughters of fathers who had monitored them had fewer impulsive behaviors and less risk of alcohol use. The same held true for mothers and sons.

An article published recently by MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) brought to light the fact that the dangers of underage drinking are even greater off the roadways; that the issue is not singularly about drinking and driving, but all risks associated with underage drinking. MADD released a new analysis of data that estimates that over two-thirds of all deaths associated with underage drinking are not on the roadways. They are incidents like suicides, alcohol-poisonings, falls, drownings, burns, and other causes of death. Those statistics, MADD points out, does not include other impacts, such as unplanned or unsafe sex, injuries, declining school performance, and of course, the gamble of having alcohol-related problems later in life.

For these reasons, it is important to remember that as parents, we are not powerless over this issue. Parental influence is the most important factor in helping keep teens safe. Stay involved in your teens lives. Be involved with their interests. Talk to your teen about expectations and rules. Get to know their new friends and parents of friends.

One day soon they will be adults. But that day is not today.

Go to www.tritowncouncil.org for more resources on this topic, or the Tri-Town Council Facebook page; to learn more about Marilyn Belmonte go to www.gethealthyoutcomes.org