Think underage drinking doesn’t affect a teen’s brain? Think again.

It’s a fact. New research shows alcohol affects a teenager’s developing brain differently than an adult’s. Memory, learning and impulse control can be impaired seriously. The risk of addiction goes up dramatically. So talk to your kids about the dangers of alcohol and set clear rules about no alcohol use.

Visit the new website for parents with information to help prevent underage drinking.
To All Idaho Parents,

We need your help! You have more power over the choices your children make than you may realize. Studies show parental disapproval is the number one reason kids choose not to drink alcohol.

The disturbing fact is that underage drinking is a serious problem in Idaho. Heavy binge drinking begins as early as the sixth grade, and new scientific evidence proves underage drinking can cause permanent damage to a teen’s rapidly developing brain. As a result, the need for parents to stay involved in their children’s lives has never been greater.

The most effective parenting techniques are among the most simple, including:

• Setting clear rules about no underage drinking
• Knowing where your children are and whom they are with
• Knowing your children’s friends
• Ensuring your children’s environments are alcohol-free
• Having daily, positive communication and interaction with your children

The State of Idaho is urging parents to join us in fighting this severe threat to our children by educating themselves about the dangers of underage drinking and the proven skills to prevent it. Visit http://www.odp.idaho.gov today for more information. Our children deserve to have the brightest possible future we can give them, so start talking before they start drinking.

We wish you and your family all the best.

Sincerely,

C.L. “Butch” Otter
Governor of Idaho

Lori Otter
First Lady of Idaho

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS that alcohol affects a developing teen brain differently from an adult brain. "The brain goes through dynamic changes during adolescence, and alcohol can seriously damage long and short-term growth processes" (American Medical Association, 2003).

Alcohol use may impair memory, learning, decision making, and impulse control, and it greatly increases the risk of addiction. In addition, alcohol use can cause young people to develop social problems, have poor judgment, get into trouble, do poorly in school and experience failure in achieving lifelong goals.

To compound this problem, research shows that parents generally underestimate the extent of teen drinking and its negative consequences. Thirty-one percent of youths who said they had been drunk in the past year were said by their parents to be non-drinkers. Others may view underage drinking as inevitable, but it isn’t. To be alcohol-free, a teen needs the active involvement and help of a parent. All children need help from their parents to guide them through their teenage years. Staying bonded to parents is critical to the process of teenagers emerging healthy, safe and alcohol free.
If a teen continues drinking, he or she will begin by pretending to be a neurotransmitter. It tricks the brain into generating pleasure-reward feelings from a harmful chemical instead of a real experience. If a teen continues drinking, the brain changes and adapts to the presence of alcohol and soon the teen needs more and more alcohol to create the same amount of pleasure.

If your family has a history of alcoholism, your children need to know that they are at a greater risk for problem drinking.

If a teen continues drinking, he or she will begin to feel a craving for it and feel uncomfortable — sometimes even extreme discomfort — without it. He or she becomes addicted. Getting their next drink becomes more important than family, grades or even sports.

Because the teen brain produces an abundance of dopamine, it can go rapidly from liking, to wanting, to needing alcohol, programming it for alcoholism. Alcohol can also damage the brain's ability to sense pleasure from normal, healthy things and experiences — leaving a young person feeling “flat” about things he/she previously enjoyed.

**Increased risk of addiction**

**Alcohol dependence**

- A person who starts drinking at the legal age of 21 has only a 7 percent chance of becoming addicted.
- Children who begin drinking at age 13 have a 45 percent chance of becoming alcohol dependent.
- Research shows that parents consistently underestimate teenage binge drinking.

**Parental influence on alcohol use**

**EDUCATION ALONE is not enough to deter teens from drinking as they enter difficult social transitions in adulthood, because there are many pressures and opportunities to drink. Parents who are actively involved can have a powerful influence on their child’s decision to remain alcohol-free.**

Teen perceptions of parental disapproval are great deterrents: What parents may not realize is that children say parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink.

Research indicates that children are less likely to drink when their parents are involved in their lives and when they and their parents report feeling close to each other. Family conflict and a lack of bonding with parents report or due to family history.

Explain their reasons for not drinking, other. Family conflict and lack of bonding are associated with increased risk of drinking. Mixed messages, and unclear rules and expectations also leave children more vulnerable to underage drinking.

**START TALKING BEFORE THEY START DRINKING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>START TALKING</th>
<th>BEFORE THEY START DRINKING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>If parents drink, they should:</strong></td>
<td><strong>If parents don’t drink, they should:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Be clear that they do not want their children to drink alcohol until they are 21 years old and then only in moderation.</td>
<td>Explain their reasons for not drinking, whether they are religious, health-related or due to family history.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell their children that some people should not drink alcoholic beverages at all.</td>
<td>Encourage children to talk about concerns and questions about drinking.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Children and adolescents:</strong></td>
<td>Be clear that they do not want their children to drink.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individuals of any age who have a problem restricting their drinking to moderate levels.</td>
<td>Explain that when the children are 21, if they should decide to drink, they should do so in moderation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women who are pregnant.</td>
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<td>People who plan to drive or take part in activities that require attention or skill.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People using prescription and over-the-counter medications.</td>
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**Put your children to bed before they drink.**

**In fact, a national survey found 3 percent of kids who said they had been drunk in the past year had parents who believed their children to be non-drinkers.**

**1. Explain the rules.**

Learn and explain the risks of underage drinking. Emphasize that drinking alcohol is not a “rite of passage” but a dangerous drug for a teen brain.

**2. Talk early and often.**

In Idaho, surveys indicate some youths binge drink in the sixth grade, and a few may start even earlier.

**3. Set clear rules.**

Set clear rules about no alcohol use. Be specific: “Absolutely no underage drinking in our family.”

**4. Know your children’s friends.**

Get to know your children’s friends and their parents. Help them choose friends who support your family rules.

**5. Monitor children’s activities.**

Always know where your children are, when they are with and what they are doing. For example, “If I’m at a party, call me and I’ll come and get you.”

**6. Make alcohol uncool.**

Ensure that alcohol is not available to your child at home or from others when your child is away.

**7. Be involved.**

Develop close bonding experiences and have daily positive interactions with your child.

**8. Stay in contact.**

Studies show children are more likely to drink between the hours of 10:00 – 6:00 PM, when unsupervised by parents. Give your kids a call.
NEW BRAIN RESEARCH AND THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

A

LCOHOL AFFECTS a teen brain differently than it affects a mature adult brain. The brain goes through rapid development and "wiring" changes during the ages of 12 through 21. Teen alcohol use can damage this brain wiring, which is essential to become a mature, thoughtful, responsible adult.

About the brain:
The brain is the major organ of the central nervous system and the control center for all the body’s voluntary and involuntary activities. It is responsible for everything we think, feel, see, say and do. The brainstem controls vital body functions, such as breathing and digestion. The cerebellum’s main functions are the maintenance of posture and the coordination of body movements. The cerebral cortex, which consists of the right and left cerebral hemispheres, is the site of most conscious and intelligent activities.

THE BRAIN

Prefrontal cortex

Hippocampus

Hippocampus

Prefrontal cortex

Alcohol can damage two key brain areas:

1. Prefrontal area (responsible for thinking, planning, good judgment, decision-making, and impulse control) undergoes the most change during adolescence. Researchers found that adolescent drinking could cause severe changes in this area ... which plays an important role in forming adult personality and behavior. Damage from alcohol at this time can be long-term and irreversible.

2. The hippocampus (involved in learning and memory) suffers the worst alcohol-related brain damage in teens. Those who had been drinking more and for longer had significantly smaller hippocampi (10 percent). In addition, short-term or moderate drinking impairs learning and memory far more in youths than adults. Frequent drinkers may never be able to catch up in adulthood, since alcohol inhibits systems crucial for storing new information.

American Medical Association Fact Sheet, 2003

Alcohol acts like a computer virus in the brain by:

- Slowing or shutting down brain activity.
- Deleting or disrupting neural messages.
- Damaging neural connections.
- Hindering formation of mature brain wiring.
- Rewiring a brain’s pleasure-reward system, which can lead to alcohol dependence/addiction.

The brain’s hippocampus (responsible for learning and memory) can be 10% smaller in underage drinkers.

It has become clear that, during adolescence, the brain is highly plastic and shaped by experience. Alcohol appears to interfere with the changes in circuitry that occur during learning.

Dr. Aaron White, Duke University

"Errors, through their choices and actions, have the power to direct the development of their once brains."

Dr. J.T. Greenfield, head resident, National Institutes of Health

"The use of alcohol, by itself or with other drugs, can retard the normal growth and development of young people."

American Academy of Pediatrics, "Averting Your Childs’ Drug and Alcohol Use"

In sometimes subtle and sometimes dramatic ways, underage alcohol use can sidetrack the trajectory of a child’s life – and its.

The U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action, 2007

"During peaks of plasticity, the adolescent brain is “wiring” two important brain areas: the prefrontal cortex (responsible for planning, decision-making, good judgment and impulse control) and the hippocampus (involved in memory and learning). During this period of development, the brain must make the key neural connections to wire itself to become a responsible, thoughtful adult. Alcohol, which acts as a depressant, slows down brain activity and hinders development.

Our brain is more complex than the world’s most powerful computer. It is responsible for everything we think, see, hear, feel, smell or do. It creates images and affects all of our emotions. The brain is divided into different areas that direct different parts of our body. Like a complex computer, all the different parts of the brain can work at the same time – like parallel processing. It does this through more than 100 billion brain cells called neurons. A neuron looks sort of like a tree, with "branches" called dendrites, a "trunk" called axon, and "leaves" called axon terminals. The top of each "leaf" contains tiny forks of powerful chemicals called neurotransmitters. At the top of the "trunk" is a tiny electrical generator called a soma.

The brain communicates by sending electrical and chemical messages from the "roots" of one neuron to the "branches" of another. If a thought or action is repeated often, the "roots" of one neuron send more chemical and more chemical, and the receiving neuron makes more "branches" to receive it. The neural connection is strengthened until it begins to look like a bushy tree instead of a spaghetti tree. It becomes a dominant neural pathway.

40 percent of our neurons are “rest” of birth. They perform automatic functions such as breathing, heart and lung functions, digestion, etc. The other 60 percent are waiting to be stimulated by our learning and experiences to make connections or “wire.” When we learn new things or do new activities, new “NEURAL CONNECTIONS” are made in our brain. This is referred to as “wiring” our brain. It is like loading new software into a computer so it can do more things. The more neural connections we make, the smarter and more capable we become.
Alcohol and judgment

The teenage brain is still developing. Alcohol can impair the parts of the brain that control the following:

- **Motor coordination**
  - This includes the ability to talk, think and process information.
- **Impaired critical thinking and reasoning**
  - This is when a person will do something that they might not do if they had more time to think about it.
- **Memory**
  - Impaired judgment and memory can occur when too much alcohol has been consumed.
- **Judgment and decision-making capacity**
  - Drinking and young people can engage in risky behaviors that can result in harm, injury and even death.

Risks associated with underage drinking

Alcohol use among children is strongly correlated with violence, poor academic performance and other harmful behaviors. Education alone will not keep your kids from using alcohol because there are constant pressures and opportunities to drink.

Further, the areas of the brain that encourage impulsivity and risk-taking develop early in a teen, while the areas that improve self-control don't develop until the very late teens or early twenties. You must stay actively involved as a parent in bonding, guiding your teen, setting boundaries and monitoring to help your teen remain alcohol-free.

Violence

Children who start drinking before the age of 15 are 12 times more likely to be injured while under the influence of alcohol and 10 times more likely to be in a fight after drinking, compared with those who wait to drink until they are 21.

School

Teens who use alcohol have higher rates of academic problems and poor performance than non-drinkers. Among eighth-graders, higher truancy rates are associated with greater rates of alcohol use.

Promiscuity

Alcohol use by teens is a strong predictor of unprotected sexual activity and unwanted sexual advances.

Traffic deaths

Auto crashes are the number one killer of teens and more than one third of teen traffic deaths are alcohol-related. In the past year, 28 Idaho children and young adults died in crashes involving drinking drivers. Thirty percent of Idaho high school students reported riding with a drinking driver in the past month.

Illicit drug use

More than 67 percent of young people who start drinking before the age of 15 will try an illicit drug. Children who drink are 75 times more likely to use any illicit drug, more than 22 times more likely to use marijuana and 30 times more likely to use cocaine than children who never drink.

Help your child to choose friends wisely

Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Discuss your no-alcohol rule with the parent and enlist their support. Ensure that teens and their friends have planned activities with appropriate adult supervision.

Stay in contact

Be aware that studies show kids are more at risk for alcohol between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., while many parents are still at work.

Find ways to check on your kids when you are not around, either through phone calls, text messaging or through a neighbor dropping by.

If there is alcohol at a party, LEAVE.

Keep your social environment alcohol-free.

The law

Possessing, purchasing or drinking alcohol before age 21 is illegal.

It is illegal for anyone to furnish or supply alcohol to a minor — punishable by up to a $1,000 fine and 12 months in jail.

Students with high-refusal-assertiveness skills are less likely to drink underage. Decide good ways to say “no” and practice them often in role-play situations. Some ideas are:

- “No thanks. Drinking is not my thing.”
- “No thanks. I need all the brain cells I’ve got.”
- “No thanks. I’ve only got one brain. Why would I want to trash it?”
- “No thanks. Drinking before your brain is developed can dumb yourself down.”

If your child’s friends drink, encourage them to stop.

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Get to know your child’s friends and their parents. Discuss your no-alcohol rule with the parent and enlist their support. Ensure that teens and their friends have planned activities with appropriate adult supervision.

Staying alcohol-free is not easy, but it is possible. By being involved in your teen’s life and setting a good example, you can help your child remain alcohol-free.
Encouraging news:

Central to this media campaign to eliminate underage drinking is the encouraging news that studies show parent disapproval is the No. 1 reason children choose not to drink alcohol. Parents empowered can trump peer pressure.

The most effective parenting techniques are among the most simple, including:
- Set clear rules about no underage drinking
- Know where your children are and whom they are with
- Know your children’s friends
- Ensure your children’s social environments are alcohol-free
- Have daily, positive communication and interaction with your children
- Eat dinner together

Research shows teens who regularly eat as a family (57 times per week) are 33 percent less likely to use alcohol.

When parents were asked to draw the greatest influences on their teens, they placed themselves last.

Parents’ view

Most parents don’t realize they are the No. 1 influence in their children’s lives.

When teens were asked to draw the major influences in their lives, they placed their parents first, before peers and activities.

Teens’ view

You have more power over the choices your children make than you may realize.

Become a parent advocate.

Research shows teens who regularly eat as a family (57 times per week) are 33 percent less likely to use alcohol.

- Alcohol at underage parties: When adults allow minors to drink, or provide alcohol to minors, they are committing a misdemeanor. In addition, teenagers interpreted it as being given blanket permission to drink— even when adults aren’t around. Adults should not allow underage drinking in their presence, in their homes, or on their property under any circumstances.
- Alcohol advertising: American are subjected to $1 billion in alcohol marketing each year in the form of advertising and product placements on youth-oriented television and radio shows, internet sites and billboards.
- Alcohol and Minors: Do not purchase or provide alcohol for people under 21.
- Alcoholic energy drinks: A new wave of “energy” drinks have hit the market that both contain alcohol and stimulants (e.g. caffeine) and are marketed directly to teenagers. It can be very difficult to distinguish the beverages containing alcohol and the percentage of alcohol in the drinks can be as high as 10%.
- Checking of IDs: Every time alcohol is purchased, the sales clerk should check the ID of the purchaser.
- Theft of alcohol: The theft of alcohol by young people is a serious problem and “beer runs” are a common occurrence. Sometimes the easiest place to get alcohol is right next to the mail in the refrigerator, so parents need to ensure that any alcohol in the home is inaccessible.

Idaho Laws and Penalties

Penalties of providing alcohol to underage youth:
- A person who sells or furnishes alcohol to an underage youth will face fines between $500 and $1,000 plus up to one year in jail on the first offense, more on the second.

Penalties/Laws on underage alcohol use or possession:
- It is illegal for those under 21 to drink, buy, possess, transport or have open alcohol. Penalties for a minor in possession of alcohol: 1st offense can be a fine up to $1,000 and up to one year driver’s license suspension.
- It is illegal to have a fake ID to purchase alcohol. Penalty is a general misdemeanor: up to $1,000 fine, 6 months in jail.
- Those who refuse alcohol tests when driving a motor vehicle and stopped by a law enforcement officer could lose their license and get points on their driving record.
- In Idaho, people under age 21 who are found with a blood alcohol level of .02 - .07 face charges of Underage Driving Under the Influence with a 1st offense maximum penalty of a $3,000 fine and a one year driver’s license suspension.

Resources

If you believe your child or teen may be using drugs or alcohol and you want to find help, you can call:
1. A counselor at your child’s school. The child may be referred to a student assistance program with education, counseling, and support groups.
2. Your family physician or clergy. Your child’s school has a counselor trained to help.
3. Your county juvenile probation office may offer suggestions or classes to youth.
If treatment is needed, financial assistance may be available, depending on family income and existing insurance. Call BPA at 1-800-922-3406 to determine eligibility and for guidance in locating services.

Idaho 211 Council
Lists the cost or free health and human services in your community.
2-1-1 or 1-800-922-3406

Health and Welfare Substance Abuse Programs
You can find substance abuse and mental health services by using these resources.

Children’s Mental Health Councils
More information on prevention, education, or mental/health services.

Substance Abuse Prevention Services
Includes classes for children and parenting classes.

Idaho Federation of Families
More information on helping families meet the needs of youth with mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders.

Treasurer Valley Alcohol Drug Coalition
www.safidrinks.org

Idaho Laws and Penalties

For More Information

Underage Driving Enforcement Training Center
www.ddt.idaho.gov

Idaho Regional Alcohol and Drug-Awareness Resource Center (Radar)
http://idaho.radarc.org

Idaho College Health Coalition
www.idahocollegeHC.org

Idaho State Dept. of Education
www.idahoed.gov

Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking
www.preventdrinking.gov

Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free
www.challenge.org

Idaho Office of Drug Policy
http://www.odp.idaho.gov

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Credits

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Don't Stunt Your BRAIN

Keep it alcohol-free

Your brain is growing as fast as the rest of your body. In fact, a teen’s brain is still developing nearly as fast as a baby’s. Alcohol can literally stunt the way it grows, making it harder to think, remember things and make good judgments. Let your brain grow up with the rest of you. Stay alcohol-free.