

START TALKING BEFORE THEY START DRINKING

Kids who drink before age 15 are 5 times more likely to have alcohol problems when they're adults.

To learn more, go to www.stopalcoholabuse.gov
or call 1.800.729.6686



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov



My name is Shannon Bass and I have been an officer for the City of Fairmont for almost five years. Before that I worked as a Deputy Sheriff here in Martin County for four years. I grew up not too far from here in Worthington, MN and attended Worthington Community College after high school. I then attended Alexandria Technical College where I received my degree in Law Enforcement.

I am writing today to discuss underage drinking with you. With proms and graduations not too far off I feel it is a good time to talk about this issue. We all know that underage drinking has sometimes been associated with these events. I just want everyone to be safe and have good long lasting memories of these special times of our lives.

First of all Minnesota Law states it is unlawful for any person under the age of 21 years old to consume any alcoholic beverage. It is also unlawful for any person under the age of 21 years to possess any alcoholic beverage. Then you also have the Minnesota State High School League that has their own chemical eligibility rules. They state that a student shall not at any time, regardless of the quantity use or consume, have in possession a beverage containing alcohol.

Having said that, we all know it's tough to sort through the mixed messages out there about alcohol. It seems that we are constantly seeing advertisements from the alcohol industry glamorizing their products. I want you to be aware that underage drinkers are

responsible for between 10 to 20 percent of all alcohol consumed in the United States. Studies showed that in 2002 10.7 Million people age 12 to 20 years of age reported current alcohol use. Another study showed that alcohol has been tried by 44 percent of eighth graders, 64 percent of tenth graders, and 77 percent of twelfth graders.

With that in mind I would like to talk about teens and alcohol. The first thing that alcohol typically affects is judgement. If you can't make a good decision, you can't protect yourself. Studies show that the leading causes of injury and death in teens involved alcohol. Most teenagers do not know you could die from an alcohol overdose due to excessive alcohol consumption.

Underage drinking is not just for teens. It is for anyone under the age of 21 years old. That means it affects young adults who are off to college. In another study it showed that college students spend \$5.5 billion on alcohol each year. That is more than they spend on soft drinks, milk, juice, coffee, and school books combined.

With that said we need to start talking to our young people early and often. For the younger ages we need to discuss the affects that alcohol can cause to their body and discuss what they can say and do to refuse alcohol. For teens, try to model positive behavior rather than deliver a lecture. We should emphasize the value that we have the freedom to think and act independently.

It is tough to sort through all the mixed messages out there about alcohol. Here are a few suggestions that may make that a little easier.

1. Set a good example because they are watching you. Be moderate or abstain in your own use of alcohol. "Do as I say, not as I do" just doesn't cut it with this group.
2. Teach your child that actions have consequences at any age. Talk to them about alcohol and everything else. Give them encouragement and love as they grow.
3. Set reasonable but firm rules that you plan to enforce. Make it clear that alcohol is not an option until they are 21 years old.
4. Teach your children about friendship. When peer pressure hits, they'll be able to stand up for themselves and friends. Get to know their friends and their friends parents.
5. Point out the dangers that goes along with alcohol.
6. **DON'T BE NAIVE.** Watch for signs, like dropping grades, switching friends, missing money, and withdrawal. If you sense a problem, seek help!

Just remember as a parent you were a teen once too. It's going to take patience, love, understanding, determination, and discipline from you to make it work.

So with that I hope everyone has safe and memorable years to come.