

Children and Adolescents' Beliefs About Alcohol

- Very young children- even preschoolers – can tell that alcohol has an effect on people that other beverages do not. In fact, children begin forming opinions about alcohol at an early age, and they tend to view it negatively.
- Boys' beliefs tend to be more favorable toward drinking than those of girls. Boys also tend to associate drinking with being more grown up – a perceived positive outcome of drinking.
- Adolescents ages 12 to 14 believe that the positive benefits of drinking (feeling good, fitting in with peers) are more likely to occur than the negative effects of drinking (feeling sick, causing serious health problems).
- Adolescents ages 12 to 14 who expect to gain greater social acceptance from drinking are more likely to begin to drink as well as to consume alcohol at faster rates.
- Adolescents ages 12 and 13 see other people, including their parents, as less disapproving of their engaging in drinking than do younger children.
- Fifty-six percent of students in grades 5 through 12 say that alcohol advertising encourages them to drink.
- In an annual survey of adolescents, 56 percent of 8th graders, 52 percent of 10th graders, and 43 percent of 12th graders believe that having five or more drinks once or twice each weekend is harmful.
- Seventy-five percent of 8th graders and 89 percent of 10th graders believe that alcohol is readily available to them for consumption.

Risk Factors for Child and Adolescent Alcohol Use

The reasons why adolescents use alcohol are complex but include curiosity, a need to fit in with friends, and a desire to relax and escape problems. For some additional factors may be involved.

Highlights from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Alcohol Alert on Youth Drinking include the following risk factors:

- **Genetic Factors:** Children of alcoholic are significantly more likely to initiate drinking during adolescence and to develop alcohol use disorders, but the relative influences of environment and genetics have not been determined and vary among young people.
- **Children Behavior:** Research has shown that children who are very restless and impulsive at age 3 are twice as likely to be diagnosed with alcohol dependency at age 21. Aggressiveness in children as young as ages 5 to 10 has been found to predict alcohol and other drug use in adolescence.
- **Parental and Peer Influences:** Parents' drinking behavior and favorable attitudes about drinking have been associated with adolescents' initiating and continuing drinking. Early initiating of drinking has been identified as an important risk factor for later alcohol-related problems. Lack of parental support, monitoring, and communication also has been significantly related to frequency of drinking, heavy drinking, and drunkenness among adolescents. Peer drinking and acceptance also influences adolescent drinking behaviors.
- **Expectancies:** Positive expectations from alcohol use have been found to increase with age

and to predict the onset of drinking among adolescents.

Additional Risk Factors include:

- Being a sibling of an adolescent who uses alcohol and illicit drugs
- Experiencing learning disorders or other academic problems
- Delinquency
- Teen Pregnancy
- “Your Time – Their Future” is a campaign of the Center of Substance Abuse prevention of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. It urges adults to become actively involved in working with children, ages 7 to 14, to develop healthy and useful skills and interests. The campaign encourages adults to volunteer to spend more quality time with youngsters in need of guidance and mentor them toward productive and rewarding lives. Research has shown that such adult involvement can and does help children and young adolescents to resist the use of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs which are dangerous and illegal.

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental health Services Administration, Rockville, MD U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999.