

# Op-Editorial

## “A Unified Message on Underage Drinking”

Parents play a major role in their children’s choices about alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. In a recent nationwide survey by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, nearly half (46%) of 17-year-olds had attended parties where teens were drinking alcohol, smoking pot, or using cocaine, Ecstasy or prescription drugs while a parent was present.

Ohio’s Drug-Free Action Alliance and the S.C. Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services are working together to bring the “Parents Who Host, Lose The Most” public awareness campaign to South Carolina to provide parents with good information about the health risks and the legal consequences of providing alcohol to youth. The campaign encourages parents and the community to send a unified message that teen alcohol consumption is not acceptable.

Hosting a party where alcohol is available to underage youth is illegal and can pose serious health risks and legal ramifications for everyone involved. Parents should understand that taking away the car keys does not solve all of the problems related to underage drinking. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at least six youth under 21 die every day from non-driving alcohol-related causes (such as drowning and suicide), and sexual activity and delinquent behaviors increase with underage drinking.

From an economic perspective, the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation estimates that underage drinking costs our state \$899 million a year. That’s \$2,200 a year for every youth in the state.

Parents who provide alcohol to youth can face fines of more than \$1,000 and possible jail time. Knowingly allowing a person under age 21 to remain on their property while consuming or possessing alcoholic beverages can make them liable to be sued, even if they do not provide the alcohol.

Adults providing alcohol to underage youth send a mixed message and can only add to a teenager’s confusion about the acceptability of drinking. They are also sending the message to teens that they do not have to obey the law. Research shows that most teenagers appreciate it when their parents set boundaries and establish expectations that are fairly enforced. Recent research on brain development has clearly demonstrated that young brains develop more quickly in the sensation-seeking, impulsive areas before the areas that make good decisions and think through consequences. That means adults do not need to apologize for deciding what is safe and healthy for teens.

Our young people deserve to live and grow to adulthood in an environment where alcohol is not misused. Let’s be unified in our message and ask that parents be parents, and not try to be their children’s pals.

