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**Parents Should Start Talking
Before They Start Drinking**

Most Oakland County youth who drink alcohol usually began drinking in the seventh, eighth or ninth grades. When youth drink alcohol at such young ages, serious harm begins. More children are killed by alcohol than all illegal drugs combined. In addition, children who begin drinking alcohol before the age of 15 are 5 times more likely than those who start after age 21 to develop alcohol problems.

To address this public health concern, fourteen local community coalitions are announcing their 2007 Underage Drinking Prevention Initiative. The focus of this campaign is to reduce youth access to alcohol, educate about the harmful consequences of underage drinking, and help parents become more effective in protecting their children. The collaborating coalitions are members of The Alliance of Coalitions for Healthy Communities. ACHC is a nonprofit corporation whose members are local community coalitions in Oakland County. With its members united in prevention, ACHC provides the opportunity for coordination and collaboration to reduce substance abuse.

“Our children are using at younger ages, and drinking more heavily than youth did in previous years. While progress is being made, too many children are no longer able to reach their potential, and too many children are dying,” stated Donnis Reese Ph.D., Executive Director of ACHC. “When we partner with others, we can make a difference for our children, families and communities.”

“To prevent our children from destructive decisions, we need to start talking early,” declared Dr. Reese. Parents who talk and listen to their child every day, for at least 15 minutes, are more likely to have an influence on their child’s decisions.

- When parents listen to their child’s activities and interests, they have opportunity to share their own interests and values.
- Children who spend time in healthy activities are less likely to make unhealthy choices. Parents should encourage their child to pursue activities and to build relationships with caring friends and adults.

- Parents are the role model for their children. As parents deal with stressful situations without using drugs or alcohol, children learn valuable lessons for coping with their own stressful lives. Parents' actions are the most powerful indicator of what is appropriate and acceptable in their family.
- Parents need to set clear rules about alcohol use.
 - Be specific: Alcohol is for adults for an important reason. Alcohol is harmful to youth.
 - Be consistent: Apply the rules at all times.
 - Recognize good behavior: "Notice when your child is obeying the family rules and always let your children know how pleased you are when they respect the rules of the household," suggests Dr. Reese.

The teenage brain is still developing. Alcohol can impair the parts of the brain that control the following: (DHHS, 2003)

- > Motor coordination. This includes the ability to walk, drive and process information.
- > Impulse control. Drinking lowers inhibitions and increases the chances that a person will do something that they will regret when they are sober.
- > Memory. Impaired recollection and even blackouts can occur when too much alcohol has been consumed.
- > Judgment and decision making capacity. Drinking may lead young people to engage in risky behaviors that can result in illness, injury, and even death.

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