

Teens and alcohol: a dangerous mix

Kim M. Rodrigues

Alcohol abuse is prevalent among many sectors of society; they include teenagers, college students, professionals, blue collar workers, the unemployed, pregnant mothers and even the elderly. The cost to communities is high.

According to SAMSHA, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, "Teens' brains and bodies are still developing; alcohol use can cause learning problems or lead to adult alcoholism. People who begin drinking by age 15 are five times more likely to abuse or become dependent on alcohol than those who begin drinking after age 20."

Consequences for college students who abuse alcohol are also staggering. In addition to problems with academic performance, SAMSHA reports that 1,700 die each year from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor vehicle crashes. Alcohol is also a high contributing factor in assaults, sexual assaults or date rape, and unsafe sex.

Alcohol abuse amongst workers can lead to lost productivity, injuries, and an increase in health insurance claims. Pregnant women, who drink, put their babies at risk for fetal alcohol syndrome. As well, SAMSHA reports that alcohol, medication misuse, and mental health problems can be significant issues for older adults.

April is alcohol awareness month. It is designated as such to recognize the serious problem of alcohol abuse. SAMSHA lists the following warning signs:

- Drinking alone or when feeling angry or sad.
- Drinking affects your job or worries your family.
- Drink after telling yourself you won't.
- Forgetting what you did while drinking.
- Getting headaches or a hangover after drinking.

You can call SAMHSA's Health Information Network at 1-877-SAMHSA-7 for help and information regarding alcohol abuse. In addition, its Web site ncadi.samhsa.gov/seasonal/aprilalcohol/ offers information on how communities can address alcohol abuse. These are not easy issues to talk about. But by starting the dialogue and raising awareness we create a healthy community for the youth of Greater Fall River.



Return to full page in "Fall River Living Well"

