

Refuse, Remove, Reasons: Alcohol from Home

On the Video...

Nick, who wishes to remain anonymous, started drinking when he was 12 years old.

"I loved it. I was off to the races then. It made me feel 10 feet tall and bulletproof," says Nick, now 19.

Where did he get his first taste?

"I think it was off of some Jack Daniels I got out of my parents' liquor cabinet," says Nick.

In fact, according to a report published in the journal, *Preventive Medicine*, preteens are more likely to get alcohol from their own home or a friend's home than any other place.

"I think parents are just oblivious to the fact that their kids are drinking," says Ari Russell, substance abuse prevention director at GUIDE, Inc., (Gwinnett United in Drug Education, in Georgia). "They just think that they are too young to start thinking about alcohol. And so they are not checking their supplies, they are not seeing the whiskey going down in the bottle. Is there a beer missing from the refrigerator? Is there a wine cooler missing from the refrigerator? They are not even paying attention to it."

Experts say the younger children start drinking, the more likely they are to suffer damage to their brain, heart and liver, and the less likely they are to ever put the bottle down.

"If they start drinking before age 15, the chances of them developing alcoholism are much greater because they are learning early on to use alcohol as a social crutch," says Russell.

Nick's last drink was more than a year ago, and it was the night he totaled his truck while drinking and driving. "I woke up in the driver's seat, blood all over me, glass everywhere. The doctors said my friend had 48 hours to live," he says.

Nick's mom says if she had to do it over again, she'd make sure the alcohol was out of his reach.

"It wasn't that easily accessible; I would certainly make it totally inaccessible," says Kathy, Nick's mother.

What We Need to Know...

A report by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSA) indicated that the majority of adolescents are drinking either in their own home or in the home of someone else. Two-thirds of teens admit they have taken liquor from their parents without their parents' knowledge.

Sanctioning and enabling underage drinking is illegal in the United States, and some parents who have had to learn this have faced fines and jail time as a result of poor decisions. Social host liability laws in states across the country are changing parents' minds, as the responsibility for underage drinking moves from teens who consume alcohol to parents who provide it to teens. Under these laws, adults who serve or supply alcohol to persons under the age of 21 can be held liable if any of those underage persons are killed or injured. Adults also can be held responsible if teens who drink at their homes kill or injure another person. Parents who break these laws could be charged for medical bills and property damage and could be sued for emotional pain and suffering.

Experts recommend that parents lock up their alcohol at home. Send your children a clear and consistent message that you do not want them to drink before the age of 21 – and do not make exceptions for special occasions like prom parties, spring break or graduation parties.

Conversation Starters...

- How do you define respect? Responsibility? How does underage drinking impact respect and responsibility... for yourself, your family and others?
- Sometimes teens are frustrated by the limits placed by their parents. Do our limitations on alcohol frustrate you? Why would we be concerned?
- If you encounter alcohol at a party, what will you do?