

KILLING OUR KIDS WITH KINDNESS ?

(Article by Corporal Ed Moses, Missouri State Highway Patrol)

According to the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, every age group is enjoying better health...except for those between the ages of 16 and 24 years. In fact, the death rate for this age group has increased significantly in the last 10 years!

The single biggest killer of our 16 to 24 year olds is car crashes. And the biggest cause of car crashes is alcohol.

Some law enforcement agencies, in an effort to address the problem, have endorsed or promoted "reasonable drinking groups". On the surface they may sound good, but problems exist with the philosophy behind the responsible drinking concept for underage youth.

A case in point was a 16-year old girl who defensively told a teacher that she was a responsible drinker: she only drank between six and twelve beers at the weekly parties. The shocker is that the majority of the junior class nodded their heads in agreement to her definition of responsible drinking.

Some specific problems with the reasonable drinking concept are:

1. Prior to age 20-22, a person **can become an alcoholic 10 times as quickly** as he/she would have had he/she waited until the legal age to drink. That fact, plus the current drinking trends of our young people, helps explain why a third of our nation's 10 million alcoholics are teenagers.
2. The threshold of impairment for adults is estimated to be between 0.03 percent and 0.05 percent (one to three beers, depending on size and other factors) with everyone being impaired by 0.05 percent. **One to three beers means the adult driver is two to six times more likely to be involved in a crash.**
3. We tell teens when they have had too much to drink (0.03 percent to 0.05 percent), and then tell them to use good judgment in driving, riding with impaired drivers, making social decisions, etc. The problem is this: dexterity is the second area of the brain affected by drinking: **the first areas to be affected are inhibitions and judgment.** So, what we have is a relatively new driver/drinker, socialized, trying to make good decisions with an inexperienced, impaired brain.
4. Some adults believe that if we accept the fact that teens are going to drink anyway, and cater to that belief, we have helped to avoid other problems such as car crashes, use of other drugs, etc. Some organized groups propose signing a contract with children. But, this only lulls the parent into a false sense of security that a signed piece of paper in a dresser drawer will have more pressure on a teen than his peers in a party atmosphere. Look at the contract from the teen's perspective. **Their parents, in writing, just told them it is OK to drink. Just don't drive or ride with someone under the influence.**
5. **"Responsible use" promoters tend to zero in on drunk driving, misunderstanding or ignoring the other problems drinking imposes on teens:** alcoholism, murder, suicide, increased sexual disease, unwanted pregnancy, crime, violence, etc.

The bottom line is this: The parent loves his/her child in such a way that the biggest concern is **IF** the child will be hurt or killed, not **HOW**. Those with less commitment to the individual child attack the problem with an idea (responsible drinking) that will only magnify a problem in another area.

While some efforts are well intended, let us not "kill our kids with kindness". Instead, as actress Carol Burnett once said, "Sometimes you have to love your children enough to let them hate you." They will love you later for it.

Rev 10/09

(Copied with permission by PRIDE-Omaha, Inc.)