

### Talking To Your Teen *continued*

#### Thinking About Your Values

Parents, have you ever thought about what your behavior and choices teach your children about alcohol? Our culture trains us to think and behave in certain ways: patterns, habits and ways of using alcohol can slip into our lives without our knowing or noticing.

In the same way, you teach your teen values and habits without even knowing you are doing it. Here are some questions that might help you decide what rules and boundaries you want to give your teen.

- ✓ Are you comfortable with allowing your teen to have a glass of wine at a special family dinner?
- ✓ Are you OK with purchasing alcohol for your child?
- ✓ Is there a difference between your teen drinking to work up courage in a socially awkward situation and drinking to simply have fun? Is one motivation for drinking more acceptable than the other? Why?
- ✓ Would you knowingly allow a party where alcohol was being consumed by underage youth at your house? Do you know the legal risk you are taking if you do allow it? Can you be in "control" of what happens at a party like this?
- ✓ Would you knowingly allow your teen to attend a party where you knew alcohol would be served?
- ✓ If your teen has a curfew, does it apply in the same way when they may be drinking? Do you need to make a special rule to keep them safe when alcohol is served?
- ✓ What is acceptable drinking behavior for a teenager in your eyes?

#### Talk Listen and Follow Through

Parents sometimes find that they can be clear about how they feel about the use of illegal drugs, but have more trouble when it comes to drinking. This may be because alcohol seems to be everywhere in this culture, or because your teen is under social pressure to drink, or even because it seems like every parent you know takes a different approach.

It is your job as a parent to establish the boundaries that you believe to be the best for your teen and then be consistent about enforcing them. Use your answers to the questions above to carefully consider the rules of alcohol use for your family. Here are some guidelines:

- ✓ Develop clear, reasonable and safe rules. Aim to provide consistent rules with consistent consequences.
- ✓ Try not to let emotions get in the way.
- ✓ Establish a range of consequences that will suit different degrees of rule breaking and be prepared to negotiate.
- ✓ Show trust in your teen, but also set boundaries. Some rules can be made in consultation with your teen, others are not negotiable. It's OK to say "no".

- ✓ Balance monitoring of your teen's behavior with allowing them to develop their independence.
  - ✓ Show teens that adults also have to follow rules to be safe and considerate of others.
- Finally, follow through with talking to your teen.
- ✓ Ask them for their thoughts about the choices.
  - ✓ Listen without judgment.
  - ✓ Encourage them to think beyond the moment: what are the long-term consequences?
  - ✓ Let them know what you think and feel.
  - ✓ Tell them that no matter what they do, they can call you for support, and excuse to leave or say no to a risky activity, or a ride home. Explain your family's rules about drinking alcohol and the consequences for breaking those rules.

Drinking alcohol is very prevalent in our society and has come to the place where it is commonly accepted behavior. At this seminar we heard that while we discourage drinking, we must also accept the fact that it will happen. Therefore we must be vigilant in monitoring the use and abuse of it. Remember, when you make a choice to take that first drink, you must also make a choice with each and every drink you take. The decision must be to drink responsibly. Yours is not the only life affected by the consumption of alcohol.