

Partners in Prevention Active in Evansville

Partners in Prevention- Rock County is working closely with the Evansville Working Group to address underage drinking in the community.

Partners in Prevention is a coalition of proactive leaders working together to reduce youth substance abuse and build the community's capacity to create a safe and drug-free environment for all people of Rock County. The purpose is the achievement of a healthy community through prevention and reduction of substance abuse with a focus on youth.

"The Evansville Police Department is looking forward to partnering with the Evansville Working Group and Partners in Prevention to address the issue of underage drinking in the community," said Chief Scott McElroy.

Underage drinking is not only illegal, but it also can cause serious, long-term issue when it comes to an adolescent reaching his/her potential. New studies from the American Medical Association report that the human brain doesn't fully develop until age 25. This research reveals that alcohol use during teenage years can have a permanent impact on the way teens learn and succeed in school. Alcohol use during teen years can slow or halt the growth of the sections of the brain that control learning and memory. The earlier a teen starts drinking, the more damaging and lasting the effects of alcohol can have on the brain.

From ages 13 to about age 25 a pruning and strengthening process is happening in adolescent brains. During this time, the brain connections that get used the least die off; those that get used the most get stronger. This is why it's so important for parents to encourage teens to participate in healthy activities. The more time your teen spends learning a behavior, whether good or bad, the stronger that brain connection gets.

Teens are most likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol from ages 12-18 when the brain is rapidly changing and most vulnerable to outside influences. Why? One reason may be because the brain region that is responsible for making complex judgments (the Prefrontal Cortex) isn't fully mature. Teens are more likely to be influenced by the emotional or motivational regions in the brain because they are more developed.

According to the Rock County Search Institute survey, almost 30 percent of kids in grades 6-12 reported having an alcoholic beverage in the past 30 days. Some students even reported having their first drink as early as age 8. Adolescents that start drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcohol dependent.

In these studies, alcohol-using teens were given basic tests. Results were compared to tests taken by those not using alcohol. They showed that frequent drinkers score more poorly during tests of learning and memory. The report also shows teen drinkers scored worse than non-users on vocabulary, visual recall and memory tests. They were also more likely to do poorly in school, fall behind and experience social problems, depression, suicidal thoughts and violence.

This research makes a clear connection between alcohol use and normal brain development in adolescents. The earlier teens start drinking, the more damage will be done to the developing brain.

For more information on this issue or Partners in Prevention, please call (608) 758-1844 or visit their Web site at www.partnersinpreventionrockcounty.org.