Teenage Alcohol Essay, Research Paper

Teenage Alcoholism

What is alcohol? Alcohol is many things to many people: To little kids, it is a curiosity. To teenagers, it is cool . To responsible drinkers, it is a relaxant. To bartenders, it is a job, their lives. To restaurant owners, it is a moneymaker. To probation officers, it is a frustration. To actively drinking alcoholics, it is heaven. To wives and husbands of drinking alcoholics, it is a waste. To recovering alcoholics, it is a painful old friend. To us, it is something to be learned about and controlled. (Dolmetsch, p.4) The definition of alcoholism stresses the basic elements of (1) chronicity; (2) compulsive, uncontrollable drinking; (3) intoxication; and (4) interruption of normal life functions. (Claypool, p. 91) When the drinker s work, social life, study habits, mental health, or family and personal relationships are affected, the possibility exists that the drinker may be an alcoholic. If the drinker is able to stop drinking permanently, then he is not considered to be an alcoholic. For teenagers and adults, alcohol is the most commonly abused drug. It is easy to get, easy to use, and as common in our society as aspirin. (Claypool, p. 62) Millions of American teenagers drink alcohol. Young people drink for many reasons; whether it s to escape the daily stress of school or family life, or to fit in with their friends. But sadly enough, many teenagers discover too late that drinking cannot solve any of their problems. Teenage drinking is now one of the most serious problems that young people face. (Landau, intro) In 1977, Senator Frank J. Dodd stated: Alcoholism is one of the greatest health problems in the United States and is one that afflicts individuals in virtually all social and economic categories and varying age groups. (Claypool, pp. 90 -91) From the time children reach the age of 13 +, 63 percent of the boys and 54 percent of the girls have at least tried their first alcoholic beverage. (Claypool, p. 14) Alcohol use substantially increases each year throughout junior and senior high school. By the twelfth grade, 93 percent of the young men and 87 percent of the young women have at least tried one drink. Thirty percent of these students had five or more drinks in a row within the previous two weeks. (Landau, p.15) The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism states that: By the time teenagers reach twelfth grade, more than half of them drink alcohol at least once a week; Nearly half of all teenagers who drink say that they have been drunk at least once compared to only 19 percent twenty years ago; Five percent admit they get drunk once a week or more often; Thirty-four percent say their drinking habit has created problems with school, friends, or police; The average amount of alcohol a teenage drinker consumes is equivalent to four twelve-ounce cans of beer a week; Beer is the favorite alcoholic beverage of teenagers. More than three million 19 percent of the 14-17 year olds in the U.S. are considered problem drinkers. (Claypool, pp. 55-56, 85) The society that we live in today drinks heavily and this influences many teenagers. Most Americans use alcohol to celebrate weddings, toast anniversaries, welcome the New Year, and for many other special events. Despite the fact that serving alcohol to young people is against the law, it is a commonplace event. (Claypool, p.15) When a child becomes a teenager, this means that he is getting older and that he might want to experiment and discover new things. At this age he might try to take risks and explore newfound boundaries. Experimentation to find personal identity is certainly normal during the teen years. Once a child does become a teenager, it seems like he is always being faced with different obstacles such as not being one of the crowd, and with problems at home or with school. They might want to hide their feelings that go along with their problems, and they may feel lonely and depressed. There are many hard decisions to be made like whether to take drugs, or to drink alcohol. While a minor is not allowed to drink by law, he is constantly being encouraged to drink by television, movies, and peer pressure from friends. (Dolmetsch, pp. 20, 22-23) Most people, it seems, drink to take away stress. Dr. William Pendlebury, a neurologist stated in an interview: In some people alcohol has a chemical effect in the area of the brain that controls feelings. This area is stimulated by the alcohol in those individuals, and by doing that, people s feelings of well being are increased. (Dolmetsch, p. 9) Even though it is illegal, most teens begin experimenting with alcohol when they are with their friends. The common causes that provoke teens to drink are to socialize, to loosen themselves up, to ease peer pressure, to feel better , to attract the opposite sex, or to assert their independence. When teens use alcohol, many problems may arise. They may lose their good health, have legal problems a record, they may cause injuries and death, they may get poor grades in school, and they may become dependent on alcohol for everything. (Spence, p.6) Parental attitudes towards drinking are among the most important factors in how teens drink. Many parents view teen drinking as a normal activity, and as an inevitable part of growing up, since they themselves are drinkers as well. Many first drinks for kids take place in their parent s homes with parental consent. Few parents encourage their children to get fully intoxicated, but many parents see nothing wrong with their children drinking occasionally. Margaret Bacon and Mary Brush Jones, authors of Teen Age Drinking, state: Parents who drink are more likely to raise children who also drink, just as parents who abstain are more likely to raise children who also abstain. Of coarse, young people do not always follow their parents example. But the drinking behavior of parents is more closely related to what their children do about their drinking than any other factor friends behavior, living area, religion, and so on. The connection between what parents do and what their sons and daughters do is marked. (Claypool, pp.16, 49-50) Teenagers often find alcoholic beverages available to them at unsupervised parties, and at their friends homes. Many evade the state minimum-age laws by having an older friend buy the liquor for them, or use false ID s which are fairly easy to obtain. In instances where it is more difficult to purchase alcohol, young people frequently obtain it by stealing from stores or even from their parent s household supply. (Landau, p15-16) Alcohol will affect people in many ways. Once swallowed, it is absorbed into the bloodstream and transported throughout the body. How a person responds to alcohol depends on the quantity of alcohol consumed, the amount of food eaten prior to drinking, how quickly the alcohol was ingested, as well as the person s mood, weight, and prior drinking experience. If combined with other drugs such as tranquilizers, marijuana, prescription drugs, or over the counter drugs, it can cause serious side effects and even death. (Landau, p. 18) Aside from the lungs, liver, kidneys, heart and nervous system, alcohol will affect the brain most severely. Alcohol reaches the brain almost immediately and causes slowed reaction time, loss of concentration, poor judgement, and visual problems. (Spence, p.4) Studies show that a person s driving ability decreases at a blood alcohol content level of .04%. Driving while intoxicated is against the law in every state. Law enforcement authorities generally determine if a driver is guilty of driving while intoxicated (DWI) by the amount of alcohol in his or her blood alcohol concentration (BAC). (See chart) (Landau, p.27-28). Various civic and community groups were formed to attack the problem of drunk driving. Their aims are to inform teenagers and younger students about alcohol and its effects, and to encourage them to make thoughtful decisions about their behavior. Among these groups is Students Against Drunk Driving (S.A.D.D.). This nationwide student organization is dedicated to educate young people about the negative consequences of drunk driving. The Contract for life between parent and teenager distributed by S.A.D.D. is one of groups most valuable lifesaving measures. This agreement, which is signed by both the teenager and parent, ensures that both will not drink and drive nor ride with someone who does. (See contract) In addition to the S.A.D.D. organization are the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (M.A.D.D.) and Teen Saferides. (Landau, pp. 31-33) When people become drunk, they may believe that some remedies for sobering up may include: drinking black coffee, exercising, taking a cold shower, or getting fresh air. But the only true cure is time. A person s BAC drops about .015% per hour. As long as that person does not drink any more alcohol, the effects wear off at a continual rate. With a BAC of .10%, it takes at least three hours to reach a BAC of .05%, and even longer for the entire amount of alcohol to be eliminated from the body. (Spence, p.7) There are now many new groups that have started to help alcoholics recover from this disease of alcoholism. Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are there to help alcoholics go through the recovery process. They must be able to realize themselves that they have a problem. Although it takes a lot of time as well as patience to fully recover from alcohlism, they will eventually be able to pull through successfully. (Dolmetsch, pp. 88, 115) Alcoholism among teenagers in the United States is becoming more widespread than ever before. Current statistics present an unpleasant picture of teenage alcohol use rising every year. Alcohol use leads to teens having problems with school, family, or even with authorities. They may drink to escape these problems, or even to fit in with their friends. This problem of teenage drinking is now one of the most serious problems that young people face today, and the only way to stop these statistics from growing, is to educate the teenagers of the risks of drinking alcohol. Works Cited Claypool, Jane. Alcohol and You. New York: Franklin Watts, 1988. Landau, Elaine. Teenage Drinking. New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, Inc. 1994. Lang, Alan. Alcohol: Teenage Drinking. New York: Chelsea House, 1992. Dolmetsch, Paul, and Gail Mauricette, ed. Teens Talk About Alcohol and Alcoholism. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1987. Spence, W.R. Drinking and Driving: Murder on Our Highways. Texas: Health Edco. 1998. Vogler, Roger E. Teenagers and Alcohol: When Saying No Isn t Enough. Philadelphia: Charles Press, 1992