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Alcohol Exposure in the Media and Its Effect on Teens

Since kids and teens are major consumers of pop culture, they are exposed to frequent messages about alcohol and drug use. Alcohol exposure occurs through movies, T.V. shows, music, websites, social media, and magazines. Studies have found that in top grossing teen films it is more common than not to see teen characters drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and use illicit drugs. In addition, alcohol companies routinely place ads in magazines with large youth readerships and in commercials with a large youth audience. In the U.S., 73% of radio alcohol advertising is placed within music venues that attract youth audiences – rhythmic, pop, urban and alternative¹ and over half of rap music makes reference to alcohol. Even through marketing clothing, brand-related products and special promotions, kids are exposed to alcohol brands and slogans.

The Effects

Research has also found that popular teen movies, mainstream music, and alcohol advertisements glamorize the use of alcohol and drinkers and drug users were unlikely to suffer any consequences giving the impression that substance use is relatively common, mostly risk-free, and appropriate. Despite minimum purchase age laws, studies have found that youth who were exposed to more alcohol endorsements were more likely to drink².

Problems with Underage Drinking

- Underage drinking accounted for at least 16% of alcohol sales in 2001
- It led to 3,170 deaths and 2.5 million other harmful events like alcohol-attributable violence, traffic crashes, property crime, suicides, burns, drowning, high risk sex, etc.³

Although there are many factors that influence underage drinking including media, advertising, parents, home environments, and peers, *parents and caregivers can do something about it.*

1. **Be aware** of the T.V. shows and movies your kids watch, the music they listen to, and the websites they visit. Alcohol companies also target kids by using social networks, mobile cell phone updates, and downloadable applications.
2. **Encourage safe discussion at home** about alcohol messages in the media and about the negative behaviors portrayed. Use the media to open the door to conversation about the short-term and long-term consequences of alcohol use in teens.
3. **Lead by example.** Always model responsible alcohol use so that teens can have positive adult role models who are responsible in their behaviors and actions.

¹ Executive Summary of "Radio Daze: Alcohol Ads Tune in Underage Youth," 2003. Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, <http://camy.org/research/radio0303/>.

² Snyder, Leslie B., PhD; Milici, Frances Fleming PhD; Slater, Michael PhD; Sun, Helen MA; Strizhakova, Yuliya PhD. (2006). *Effects of Alcohol Advertising Exposure on Drinking Among Youth*. Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine. (160, 18-24). <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/160/1/18>

³ Miller, Ted R., Levy, David T., Spicer Rebecca S., Taylor Dexter M. (2006). *Societal Costs of Underage Drinking*. Journal of Studies on Alcohol <http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=17824797>