

Malika Rawal

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Understanding and Preventing Underage Drinking and Driving

"My house is only five minutes away," "I'm not even drunk," and "Don't call my mom!" are all common phrases said before a teenager steps into their car with alcohol in their system. Unfortunately, teenagers drive intoxicated 2.4 million times a month and are 17% more likely to be involved in a crash (Sobering Up). Moreover, teens are more likely to binge drink in comparison to adults which leads to higher blood alcohol content levels (Sobering Up). But is this really their fault? I would argue, not entirely. A lack of in-depth education, societal pressures, and underdeveloped maturity all play a factor in this pandemic that is underage drinking and driving. Instead of chastising teens, there are more effective solutions: a DMV test to obtain your license, effective parent communication, a shift in mentality around the issue, and reducing access to alcohol.

At the DMV, all you need to receive your license is take a simple driving test and pass a twenty question test. Teens do not need to know the dire effects alcohol consumption has on driving, so in areas where health education programs are underfunded or non-existent, students do not have any knowledge surrounding this issue. If there was a test on teenage drunk driving, students would be forced to use online and physical resources to learn this information in order to pass the test and subsequently receive their licenses. This is a simple

yet effective solution to ensuring everyone is aware of the consequences of drunk driving at a young age-- an age where actions have not become habits yet.

Another way to push teens to abstain from drunk driving is by utilizing effective parent communication. My dad grew up with an alcoholic father, so he has abstained from drinking his whole life-- he hasn't drunk one sip to date. My mother does not drink either, but instead of laying down harsh rules for me and forcing me to be like them, my parents communicated in an effective way that made it seem like it was in my best interest to abstain from underage drunk driving. Simple psychology dictates that the stricter parents are the more their children want to act in protest. So instead of laying harsh rules, parents should discuss their desires with their teenagers and trust them to make smart decisions by teaching them to. At the end of the day, when your child is drunk you want them to call you instead of driving themselves. Teenagers should never be scared to call their parents in times of turmoil.

When looking at the issue of drunk driving, teenagers usually think of how far they can go "without getting caught." Similar to speeding, where one goes fast, sees a police car and then slows down, drunk driving usually occurs because teens feel they are stealthy enough to not get caught. A better way of thinking is "how will my driving affect those around me," "is it possible that I injure those in my car, myself, or those around me?" and "how will a DUI look on my future job applications?". With that shift of mentality, teens see the consequences of underage drunk driving rather than just the possible evasions of the consequences. There can be as many protective measures in place to reduce drunk driving, but nothing will work unless the teenager sees the repercussions of their actions.

Lastly, the best solution is to cut the source of the problem itself: alcohol. Why are teenagers accessing alcohol in the first place? Schools, lawmakers, and parents all must take action in order to decrease access to alcohol. School officials should use probable cause to search student lockers and backpacks for alcohol, and lawmakers should create stricter photo ID laws to ensure those under 21 cannot make fake IDs as easily as they do today. Lastly, parents should keep a tab on the alcohol they have at the house. In the United States, alcohol is everywhere: commercials, movies containing teen drinking, bars, clubs, college campus culture, and more. It is easy to fall into the trap of "everyone drinks and drives," so it is of utmost importance to decrease sources of alcohol.

In 2013, Ethan Couch killed four people while driving intoxicated (a mother and daughter, a young pastor, and a person in the same car) and was sentenced to ten years in prison (Watts, Amanda). His life was completely altered that night; dreams of college or a prosperous future were out of sight. Ten years in prison took him away from completing his education, starting a track to achieve his dreams, interact with people his age, and much more. Most importantly, no one should die a preventable death. It is our responsibility to decrease drunk driving, so people feel safer on the roads and there aren't more "Ethan's" in the world who have cost their entire future due to one night of bad decisions. You booze, you cruise, and you lose!

Works Cited

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