

ARLINGTON R.E.A.D.Y. COALITION

REDUCING OR ELIMINATING ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE BY YOUTH

The Coalition is coordinating community efforts to develop strategies so that Arlington teens make healthy choices by postponing or avoiding alcohol use and avoiding drug use throughout their lives.

The Arlington R.E.A.D.Y. (Reducing or Eliminating Alcohol and Drug Use by Youth) Coalition was formed in an effort to significantly reduce and delay teen use of alcohol and other drugs. The Coalition will concentrate its initial efforts on teen high risk drinking, with the understanding that there is use of other drugs in the community and that prevention efforts are similar for all drugs.

Committees

Youth Awareness and Change:

First Year Goals:

- Develop teen leadership to model and value healthy decisions related to alcohol and drug use.
- Coordinate with partners to ensure that all youth are receiving appropriate facts and strategies to avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Incorporate teen voices into work of all the committee.
- Ensure all programs and prevention efforts include effective components on refusal skills and health impact.

Community and Parent Education:

First Year Goals:

- Parents will be more aware of the extent of teen alcohol and marijuana use and more aware of the health consequences of this behavior.
- Using multiple strategies, parents will have better access to the parenting tools they need to prevent these risk behaviors.

Policy and Procedure Evaluation:

First Year Goals:

- Review Arlington County and Arlington Public School policies and consequences for when youth are caught for alcohol or other drug violations.
- Become a resource for the Community on these policies and procedures.
- Make recommendations on modification of policies or procedures.

Please contact Ben Harris (bcharris@arlingtonva.us or (703) 228-1667) for further information or if you are interested in being part of one of these committees.

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AND DRUG USE BY YOUTH

Members

John Andelin	Community Volunteer
Susan Anderson	Clarendon Alliance
Karin Beecroft	School Nurse
Bill Browning	Parent
Claire Cifaloglio	Public Health
Valerie Cuffee	DHS Child and Family Services Division
Lynn Dorfman	Community Volunteer
Barbara Gomez	Community Volunteer
Amy Graham	Partnership Staff
Judy Hadden	Community Volunteer
Luke Haglof	School Resource Officer
Kathleen Halley	DHS Substance Abuse Specialist
Ben Harris	Partnership Staff
Sarah Haynes	H-B Woodlawn Student
Linda Henderson	Partnership Chair
Kurt Larrick	DHS Director's Office
Kate McCauley	Prevention Specialist/Parent
Shannan Moore	Probation Officer
Mary Ann Moran	Partnership Staff
Sue Robinson	Community Volunteer
Jenna Ryckebusch	OAR
Edgardo Santos	APS Substance Abuse Counselor
Jan Siegel	APS Student Services
Maria Slattery	APS Health and PE
Michael Swisher	PRCR
Deborah Taylor	Substance Abuse Professional
Paul Weiss	HB Woodlawn Teacher
Vanessa Zuniga	DHS Mental Health Therapist

Parent Chats

The PACE committee held 12 parent chats from January through early April. The purpose of the chats is to:

- Provide information to parents regarding Arlington teen alcohol data and the recent adolescent brain development information.
- Learn from parents what they think they, and others, can do to prevent teen alcohol and drug use.
- Encourage parents to learn from and support each other.

Common Themes

We heard a wide range of attitudes and beliefs in the parent community about teen drinking in general. Those attitudes include:

- Teen drinking is acceptable - a rite of passage.
- "I drank in high school and I'm fine"
- Teen drinking is unacceptable - do not want their children drinking in high school
- Teen drinking is inevitable. (It's not realistic that your teen will make it to 21 without drinking.)
- There is nothing parents can do to stop teen drinking.
- It would be best if teens could learn to drink responsibly/in moderation at home - "European" model.
- Lowering the drinking age to 18 would help - then parents could teach 18 year old teens to drink responsibly at home and it wouldn't be illegal.
- Aware many teens do drink but are certain that their teen does not.
- Unaware of the extent of teen alcohol use in Arlington.

Access to Alcohol:

- Some parents wondered where/how teens get alcohol.
- Other parents said teens:
 - Take alcohol from their own home or other people's homes
 - Are served alcohol in homes by parents or other adults.
 - Get older kids/siblings to buy alcohol for them.
 - Get adults to buy for them - they just ask or they offer to pay someone to buy alcohol for them.

Prevention Ideas:

- Promote good family communication - parents and teens need to know how to talk about these issues.
- Parents can set clear rules about alcohol and drug use and their consequences for breaking those rules. The teen should know what those rules and consequences are upfront.

- Parents and other adults can model responsible drinking in the home.
- Parents can support one another and see themselves as a community.
 - Being there for each other's children.
 - Knowing and supporting each others rules i.e. curfews, places where kids can or can not go.
 - Trusting and supporting each other as parents and not being judgmental.
- Parents can create their own "positive peer pressure" to encourage other parents to set limits and agree never to serve alcohol to teens.
- Ensure the brain development info gets out to parents and teens.
- No sleepovers!
- Parents should always call "host" parents about parties - offer to bring something as an excuse for calling.
- Create a "How to Host an Alcohol/Drug Free Teen Party" checklist for parents.
- Work to prevent alcohol products from being marketed specifically to teens i.e. "alcopops".
- Work together as a community to provide more fun alternatives for teens especially on weekend nights
- Recognize that teens are hard-wired to take risks, and provide more healthy "risky" activities - i.e. rock climbing.

Several parents expressed the belief that no matter what we do to try and prevent this behavior, teens will always find a way to drink and/or do drugs.

Related Issues and Questions:

- Parents need to know what to do if they think - or know - their teen is drinking. Parents suggested:
 - An online resource list to include websites, books etc.
 - A step-by-step "how to get help for your teen" handout
- Alcohol is part of American culture and it will take a very long time to change that culture.
- There seems to be a lot of discretion regarding what schools and/or police will do if teens are caught drinking. This is confusing to parents and teens.
- As children get older, it's much harder to build community among parents - especially at the high school level.
- Parents struggle with whether they should call another parent if they know that parent's child is doing something dangerous.
- Parents are wondering what role stress plays in encouraging teens to drink and do drugs.

**Parent Attitudes and Knowledge of Teen Alcohol Use
Update through 17 April 2009**

1. **Who filled out the survey?** 307 parents filled it out. Of these, 56 percent completed the survey online, 20 percent at an event (Beach Week, Communities of Concern or the Wakefield PTA meeting) and the remaining 24 percent filled it out at a parent chat. 88 percent of the parents responded about a child in high school, 10 percent about a middle school child and 1 percent about a college student. Most parents had a child at Yorktown or W&L but we are expecting additional returns from Wakefield.
2. **How concerned are these parents about teen alcohol use?** 77 percent said they would be very or extremely upset to find out that their teen had been drinking at a party. 90 percent agreed (and 70 percent strongly agreed) that alcohol can have serious and harmful effects on the health or development of adolescents. This perception of harm seems to persist from middle school through high school.
3. **Do these parents think their children are exposed to alcohol through peer drinking or going to parties?** While 60 percent of these parents do not think their child has gone to a party with alcohol was used by kids the same age, there are quite large differences by age of child. 100 percent of parents with the youngest children (13 or below) believe this. As the children get older, the figure falls to 80 percent (for freshmen or sophomores), 50 percent (for juniors and seniors) and then 20 percent (for those 18 or older). Parents are less likely to believe that their child's friends drink once a week or more. This fall from 100 percent to 83 percent at the end of high school.
4. **Do parents feel like they have power to influence their children's decisions?** 88 percent felt they can affect teen drinking choices. This figure declines from early high school to college but not by a lot.
5. **Do parents concerned about alcohol use give their kids extra support?** I created an index to measure how many asset-related questions were answered in a way that strongly suggested that the child had the asset. The average value of this 7 point index was 4.5. But it was no higher for parents who were most concerned about teen drinking than for those who were less concerned (acknowledging that virtually all parents who filled out the survey are concerned to some degree.)
6. **What kind of support do parents want?** 15 percent said no help was needed. Most (57 percent) wanted opportunities to talk to other parents; 29 percent wanted information; 24 percent wanted profession advice and 14 percent wanted a support group. Most parents preferred to get parenting information online (39 percent) or though a workshop (35 percent.)