

# WHY 21?

## Teens and Alcohol Don't Mix

There is no “responsible use” of alcohol by minors. Not only does allowing minors to consume alcohol send a message that some laws are meant to be broken, but adolescent drinking may bring about many dangers and lifelong ramifications, especially considering that **young adults are the most likely to binge drink**. Preventing teens from drinking and driving does not protect their growing brains and bodies.

### What are the Risks to Teens?

#### Underage Drinking Harms the Developing Brain

**Because the adolescent brain doesn't finish developing until about age 25**, any alcohol use during this period of critical and vulnerable brain development can have **damaging and permanent effects on impulsivity, memory and learning, and even mental health.**



#### Teens are More Vulnerable to Addiction

**90% of Americans struggling with addiction started using substances (like alcohol, marijuana, etc.) in their teen years.** Because young people's brains are still developing into their mid-20s, they build synapses faster than adult brains. Addiction is a form of learning, so adolescents can become addicted much more easily than adults.

Research also shows that the earlier a person starts drinking, the more likely they are to struggle with serious problems with alcohol or develop an alcohol use disorder later in life. **Adolescents who drink before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21.** This means they may unsuccessfully try to quit drinking, may want to drink alcohol despite negative consequences, or will voluntarily pass up events with family and friends to drink.

#### Teens and Drunk Driving

Any amount of alcohol increases the risk of crashes among teens as compared with older drivers. Alcohol impairs reaction time, sense of spatial judgment, visual functions, and ability to concentrate on many things at once – all abilities needed to drive safely. Couple this with inexperienced teen drivers, and the results are tragic. In fact, **about one in four teen car crashes involves a driver who has been drinking.**



#### Alcohol Use is Linked to Other Risky Behaviors in Teens

According to SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services), minors who drink are more likely to use marijuana and other drugs, have poorer academic performance, engage in risky sexual behaviors, make regretful decisions, and to be injured, assaulted, or die in an accident.

### So what now?

Now that you know how underage drinking harms teens, you can help stop it from happening. First, make a commitment to never provide alcohol to minors, no exceptions. Second, talk with your kids about why underage drinking and other drug use is harmful to their growing brains and bodies. **Parent Up is here to help. We have information, tools, and resources to help with rule setting, having this conversation with your kids, and so much more. Visit [ParentUpKC.com](http://ParentUpKC.com).**

