

Underage Drinking: What Do You Think?

Session Overview

This session helps high school students explore what they believe – and what the Church teaches - about underage drinking.

Session Schedule

- Introduction to the Issue 20 minutes
- Exploring the Issue 30 minutes
- Short Break 10 minutes
- Addressing the Issue 50 minutes
- Closing Prayer 10 minutes

Learning Outcomes

- The participants will learn what Tradition and Scripture have taught about alcohol use by minors.
- The participants will explore their own beliefs about underage drinking.

Preparation

- Gather the following items:
 - ▶ Computer with large screen (or connected to an LCD projector or television monitor. You will also need to have Internet access.
 - ▶ Pens or pencils, one for each participant
 - ▶ Newsprint and markers
 - ▶ A large pillar candle
 - ▶ tea light candles (or votives), one for each participant
 - ▶ Small index cards, one for each participant
 - ▶ A Bible
- You will need to download 2-3 underage drinking public service announcements or videos. Choose from the ones found at www.mediacampaign.org, www.freevibe.com or www.psacentral.adcouncil.org.
- *Optional: The "Addressing the Issue" portion of the session involves the participants in the creation public service announcement. If you have access to a video camera you might consider taping the presentations and sharing them with the larger church community at a future time - or posting them on your church website.*

Introduction to the Issue (20 minutes)

1. Welcome the participants and ask them to gather in the center of the room. Let them know that you will be reading a series of statements and asking them to respond to the statement "with their feet" -that is by moving to one side of the room or the other. Designate the left side as the "I agree" side, and the right as the "I do not agree" side. If someone strongly agrees he or she can move as far to the left as possible, if they slightly agree they can move somewhere between the center of the room and the left side of the room. They can do the same if they disagree but moving to the right. Let them know that they can stay "neutral" with their response, but really encourage them to choose a side if possible.
2. Proceed by reading each of the statements listed below. After each statement invite a few participants to share why they choose the position where they are standing. Each statement also includes some key points for you to share - so be sure to include these before proceeding to the next statement. Continue in this fashion until all statements have been read aloud.

Statements:

- *Alcohol is the drug of choice for most teenagers*
Alcohol is used by more young people than tobacco or illicit drugs. Not only does alcohol affect the mind and body in often-unpredictable ways, but young people lack the judgment and coping skills to handle alcohol wisely. As a result alcohol-related traffic crashes are a major cause of death among young people. Alcohol use also is linked with teen deaths by drowning, suicide, and homicide. Young people who drink are more likely than others to be victims of violent crime, including rape, aggravated assault, and robbery.
- *Most teens in my town (city, parish, community, etc.) drink*
In a study of 11,426 teens, almost 18 percent indicated they drank alcohol at least once per month. About 10 percent said they drank alcohol at least once per week.
- *Anyone can develop a serious alcohol problem, including a teenager*

Teens that consume alcohol are more likely to have problems with school work and school conduct. A person who begins drinking as a young teen is four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than someone who waits until adulthood to use alcohol.

- *An occasional drink or two is not harmful to my body*
Alcohol is a depressant, which means it slows the function of the central nervous system. Alcohol actually blocks some of the messages trying to get to the brain. This, of course, alters your perceptions, emotions, movement, vision, and hearing. Drinking increases the risk of injury. Car crashes, falls, burns, drowning, and other dangerous behaviors are all linked to alcohol use. When you're not thinking straight, you're more likely to get pulled into bad situations
- *There's not much I can do if one of my friends is into drinking.*
Peer pressure can work both ways. If your friends like you and see that you are a cool person even though you don't do these things that will make a positive impression on them about the choice to live alcohol free.
- *I know what my religion says about underage drinking*
We can look to Scripture and Tradition to gain a better understanding of what the Church teaches about alcohol abuse.
- *I know what I believe about underage drinking and I feel that my actions will support my beliefs*
The first step toward being able to say no is deciding firmly what you believe—before you have to take a stand. When someone hands you a drink that is not the time to be deciding what you believe.

(Statistics are from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, found online at www.niaaa.nih.gov)

Exploring the Issue (30 Minutes)

1. Divide the participants into groups of five to six people. Provide each group with two sheets of newsprint and a marker. Ask each group to create a listing on one sheet of newsprint of reason they believe people drink alcohol (or what about alcohol make it

attractive to so many). Allow about five minutes for them to develop their list.

2. Now ask the groups to list on the second sheet of newsprint reasons not to use alcohol. Allow about five minutes for them to develop their list.
3. Invite the groups to come forward and present their lists. When all the groups have presented, offer the following comments:
 - You've come up with a good number of reasons why underage drinking is not the best choice for teens. Let's take a few minutes to see what the Church has to say to us about the issue.
 - The Church has much to say about respect for individual life. This includes having a healthy respect for your body and an understanding that you have no right to abuse your body. Alcohol can hurt your physical and mental development. During the teen years significant changes occur in the body, including rapid hormonal alterations and the formation of new networks in the brain. Exposing the brain to alcohol during this period may interrupt key processes of brain development, possibly leading to subtle learning impairments.
 - The Fifth Commandment promotes a culture of life, and it forbids other sins that are harmful to our health and total human well being such as the use of drugs or the abuse of alcohol.
 - *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that "Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God" [No.2288], and that "the use of drugs inflicts very great damage on human health and life." [No.2291]
 - Drinking is illegal. As Catholics we are morally obligated to follow the laws of the land.
 - In Ephesians we are reminded to avoid participating in actions we would be ashamed of.
 - The Scriptures also give warnings about the misuse of alcohol. Proverbs 20:1 says, "Wine is arrogant, strong drink is riotous; none who goes astray for it is wise."
 - Faith is expressed through strong beliefs that provide the moral lens through which we see when choosing between right and wrong. Our faith traditions and teachings can be a powerful motivating force when it comes to making tough choices.

- When our faith is strong we can say with confidence: “No, thanks, I don’t drink.” Our faith can be a safety zone in times of temptation.
4. Provide each group with one last sheet of newsprint and a marker. Ask each group to look at the first list they created list again. Ask them to take some time to discuss the following questions:
 - a. How might our church help provide these benefits for youth so they don’t have to look to alcohol for them? For example, if a benefit of drinking is “fun,” what could the church do to provide a setting for youth to have fun?
 - b. If a benefit of drinking is acceptance, how can the church help young people find love and acceptance in a way that does not involve alcohol?
 5. Invite the participants to gather and ask each group to share a few of their suggestions with the entire group.

Addressing the Issue (50 minutes)

1. Invite the participants to gather around the LCD or television monitor. Make sure everyone has a clear view of the screen. Then share with the participants that the White House Office on National Drug Control Policy oversees a National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. Note that the videos you have chosen are all public service announcements that have been created for television and website viewing. Then show the video you have chosen.
2. Tell the participants that they will have the chance to design their own local media campaign against underage drinking. Invite them to re-gather with their small group. Suggest that they begin to brainstorm a possible ad campaign based on the small group work they did earlier. Ask them to use the slogan . . . *This I Believe* as a basis for their campaign. (This should help them incorporate their own beliefs along with the Church’s beliefs into the presentation).
3. Ask each small group to design a public service announcement to discourage underage drinking. Let the groups know that they can be as creative as they would like but the announcement should be no longer than 2 minutes. Let them know that they will have a total of 25 minutes to complete their assignments, and then the groups will be invited to present their announcement (and if you plan to video tape the announcement let them know that as well).

4. Invite the groups to gather and share their presentations.
5. Conclude the activity by sharing your own observations about the presentations and then invite the participants to join you for the closing prayer.

Closing Prayer (10 Minutes)

1. Begin the prayer by placing the large candle in the center or front of the room and lighting it. Place the tea light candles close by. Invite everyone to take a minute to be still then proclaim Ephesians 5:10-20. Allow a few moments of silence to follow.
2. Offer the following comments:
 - The author of Ephesians does not mince words. This passage encourages the early Christians to wake up and find out what pleases God. It calls them and us to avoid participating in things that we would be ashamed of if they were exposed in the light. Its tone is not of scolding but rather of passionate encouragement, wanting the best for each of us.
 - Although the abuse of alcohol is singled out in this passage as something Christians should avoid. Drinking is an issue virtually everyone confronts during adolescence. The author of Ephesians is saying not that wine is evil in itself, but that getting drunk prevents us from being filled with the Spirit.
 - Making wise choices about alcohol is important. What temptations do you face in this regard?
 - What choices do you need to make to please God and to enjoy the fullness of life in the Spirit?
(Catholic Youth Bible, p. 1377)
3. After a few minutes of silent reflection, invite the participants to come forward one at a time and light one of the votive/tea light candles as a sign of their commitment to choices that they can always be proud of "in the light".
4. Once everyone has lit a candle, invite all to stand and bow their heads as you offer the closing prayer:

O Christ Jesus,
when all is darkness
and we feel our weakness and helplessness,
give us the sense of your presence,
your love, and your strength.

Help us to have perfect trust
in Your protecting love
and strengthening power,
so that nothing may frighten or worry us,
for, living close to You,
we shall see Your hand,

Your purpose,

Your will through all things.

(prayer attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola)

(Some of the session content was drawn or adapted from *Pathways to Prevention: A Prevention Guide for Youth Leaders in Faith Communities*. National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, Office of National Control Policy, 2003)

Additional Resources for Exploring Teens and Alcohol Use

www.sadd.org SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions), formerly Students Against Driving Drunk), is a student-lead organization that promotes healthy living for young adults.

www.ncadd.org is the website for the National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence an organization that provides education, information, and help in the fight against alcohol and other drug addictions.

www.ncadi.samhsa.gov is the site for the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, which provides a wealth of free, valuable information, and resource material that parents and others can share with young people about substance abuse.

www.mediacampaign.org is the website for the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, a multi-dimensional effort designed to educate and empower youth to reject illicit drugs. The Web site contains a comprehensive overview of all aspects of the Campaign. It provides information about the Campaign's drug prevention programs, activities and strategies.

www.TheAntiDrug.com provides parents and other adult caregivers with strategies and tips on raising healthy, drug free children.

www.freevibe.com helps young people understand the dangers of substance abuse and make responsible decisions with their lives. The site features moderated bulletin boards, role-playing games, media literacy tools, pop culture news and facts about today's drugs.

www.TheAntiDrug.com/faith dedicated to supporting the work of prevention advocates in churches. On this Web site you will find ideas for starting a prevention program in your church, youth activities, links to prevention resources and a registration form for a special e-newsletter for prevention advocates in congregations.

www.y2yint.com is a drug prevention and youth leadership organization focusing primarily on middle- and high-school students. The organization uses the influence of positive peer support and the idea of teens helping other teens to choose and maintain a drug-free lifestyle.