

Campaign Announcement... “BE THE WALL”

Drug Free Highlands, a community coalition, is launching a multi-media campaign intended to encourage and support parents, retailers, and community members in their efforts to keep teens from drinking.



Over the next year, the Drug Free Highlands in partnership with the Board of County Commissioners, Department of Juvenile Justice, Heartland Education Consortium, Heartland Workforce, Highlands County Health Department, Highlands County School Board and Avon Park High School and S.A.D.D. chapters from each High School, Highlands County Sheriff’s Office, the Redlands Christian Migrant Association, YMCA, and Youth for Christ will ask the community to “Be the Wall” between teens and alcohol. The simply stated campaign is designed on the premise that while alcohol may be the primary substance of choice for teens across the state and country, underage drinking should be the single most preventable at risk behavior among our teenagers. Debbie Lees, Substance Abuse Reduction Guide Coordinator, states, “Underage drinking comes down to access – if our teens cannot get their hands on it, they cannot use it. We are asking all community members to help us limit access to alcohol for teens once and for all.”

In Highlands County the 2008 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey reports that most teens are not drinking. However, of the 34% that report drinking in the past 30 days, 20% are self-reported binge drinkers. Current research indicates that the teen brain is still developing until the mid-20s. The introduction of alcohol, particularly in large quantities, may impair brain development. The developing teen brain also makes teens more impulsive and less likely to consider consequences of their behavior – for this reason; the campaign encourages all adults to be **clear, firm and consistent** when talking with teens about alcohol.

The multi-media campaign is part of a partnership between Highlands County and the Department of Children and Families and Florida Office of Drug Control. Its components include an interactive web site where parents can text their teen, humorous posters about natural communication gaps between teens and parents, community displays, guerilla marketing strategies and more. The focus will be on the developing adolescent brain and the behaviors that accompany its development. Using humor, adults will be educated regarding how, at times, teens are illogical, impulsive, rebellious, take risks, and test boundaries. To address this behavior, we ask parents to **be clear, be firm and to be consistent.**

Local agencies and businesses wishing to participate in the campaign by displaying images should contact Andre Centonzo, Department of Health at (863) 273-0491. Questions about the county wide campaign should contact Debbie Lees, SARG Coordinator at 863-385-0024. Questions about the statewide campaign should be directed to Amity Chandler (941) 815-7743.

BE THE WALL Talking Points...

The purpose of these talking points is to change the way we, as parents, professionals and community, talk about the problem – of underage drinking!

We want everyone in Highlands County to talk about underage drinking in the same way. As a community, we want to talk about the issue in a positive way – no more scare tactics, negative messages or “chicken little” talk. By framing the problem in a positive way, we are using a commercial marketing technique to share prevention information! Social marketing is necessary to create community change and is a recognized environmental strategy.

When we talk about the issue, we will talk about it in a realistic way – with real data – offering unified messages containing solutions and action steps. Drug Free Highland’s Board of Directors and social marketing committee created the following talking points for all of our stakeholders to have when they talk about underage drinking. As the year progresses, we will provide talking points relevant to the season – such as spring break, Prom or graduation. Please take the time to share this information with your family, church, or organization.

Talking Points

1. 66% of our teens choose to not drink!
2. That means, 2400 Middle and High School students choose to not drink on any given day in the month.
3. Yes, we can keep alcohol out of the hands of our children. That will immediately reduce access by locking up alcohol, checking IDs and setting good examples for our youth.
4. Of concern is that 1200 of their classmates choose to drink on any given day in the month. However, that means 34% do and of those, 20% of those who drink, have self reported that they are binge drinkers.
5. When students are drinking, they are less likely to attend school, pass school courses, and become productive community members. When they become 18 and enter the workforce, they will carry these behaviors with them.
6. We have to ask ourselves to what degree alcohol is responsible for school failure, school absenteeism, and a shortage of motivated workforce employees.
7. On any given day in this county, we have students participating in many positive activities provided to them such as school sports, FFA, 4H, Kiwanis, Rotary, S.A.D.D., S.W.A.T., chorus, dance teams, band, and Go Girls.
8. Most parents in Highlands County would never give alcohol to their teens. They recognize that underage drinking is NOT a right of passage to adulthood.
9. In Highlands County and across the country, teens are gaining access to alcohol through their older siblings and friends. Parents are encouraged to monitor their teen's behavior even though they appear to be more independent as they grow.
10. Parents who know their children's friends reduce the likelihood of underage drinking.
11. We encourage our teens and adults to report parties where teens may be using alcohol.
12. We encourage adults to praise teens for making good choices.
13. As adults, if we consume alcohol in a responsible manner, we set a positive example to the young people in our community.
14. In Highlands County, almost 66 % of middle and high school teens report not needing alcohol to have a good time with their friends. While alcohol remains the primary substance of choice for 34% of Highlands County teens, most Highlands County teens continuously choose to reject alcohol as a part of growing up.
15. The 2008 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey reports that Highlands County teens are choosing to reject alcohol as part of growing up. With a continued community response to underage drinking, Highlands County can continue to empower its teens to make the right decisions when it comes to alcohol and other drugs. A special thanks to Highlands County parents—their communication with the teens is clearly working!

We want to change the way Highlands County talks about underage drinking...

We want parents to talk to their children about underage drinking.

We want parents to talk to their children about the consequences of drinking.

We want parents to tell their children that they expect them NOT to drink until they are 21.

The goal of this campaign is to reinforce social responsibility for the issue of underage drinking, focus on changing the norms (community attitudes) that support the issue and creating change that is long-lasting. **We aren't telling people what to think in Highlands County – we are telling them what to think about underage drinking in Highlands County!**

Underage Drinking Data...

Underage drinking cost the citizens of Florida 3.8 billion dollars in 2001. Florida ranks 8th highest among the 50 states for its cost of underage drinking per youth (*Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation Underage Drinking in Florida- The Facts, March 2004*). The consequences of underage drinking are a tremendous expense to the U.S. economy and total more than \$53 billion per year, by far the most costly of all drug problems (*Institute of Medicine, Reducing Underage Drinking - A Collective Responsibility, September 2003*).

Research shows that underage alcohol use contributes to a variety of injury and social consequences and is more likely to kill young people than all illegal drugs combined.

Almost 20% of all traffic crashes involving a driver under age 21 involve alcohol. Motor vehicle crashes are the *leading cause of death among youth ages 15 to 20*. They are already at an increased risk through their relative lack of driving experience and drivers younger than 21 are more susceptible than older drivers to the alcohol-induced impairment of driving skills. The rate of fatal crashes among alcohol-involved drivers between 16 and 20 years old is more than twice the rate for alcohol-involved drivers 21 and older.

Research has associated adolescent alcohol use with high-risk sex (having multiple sexual partners). The consequences of high-risk sex are also common in this age group: unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

Sexual assault, including rape, occurs most commonly among women in late adolescence and early adulthood. Research suggests that alcohol use by the offender, the victim, or both increases the likelihood of sexual assault by a male acquaintance.

The health effects of underage drinking are significant and can be irreversible. Research has shown that the brain continues developing until about age 21. Studies indicate that heavy regular drinking can damage or destroy brain cells involved in learning and memory (*American Academy of Pediatrics, 1998; USA Today report, 10/18/2000*). Exposing the brain to alcohol during this period interrupts key processes of brain development, leading to mild cognitive impairment as well as to further escalation of drinking. According to Newsweek: "People who drink before they're 15 are four times as likely to be alcohol-dependent or have alcohol problems when they're adults."

Reducing underage access to alcohol not only will reduce injuries and other problems associated with drinking but may have beneficial effects for these individuals during adulthood and reduce the long-run costs of alcohol to society (*O'Malley, and Wagenaar, A.C.: The effects of minimum drinking age laws on alcohol use, related behaviors and traffic crash involvement among American youth 1976 – 1987. J. Stud Alcohol 52:478-491, 1991*).



Support our youth and become “THE WALL”