

## FEATURED LETTER

# Alcohol shouldn't be part of youthful celebrations

As summer vacation winds down, many young adults will be taking their first steps in their lifelong journey. Many will be entering their first year at college, while others already may be starting their careers. It is a critical time.

Young adults, whether they realize it or not, are building a foundation for their future. Every decision counts. One of the most important decisions one will face is whether or not to participate in underage use of alcohol. Alcohol abuse in young underage adults poses one of the biggest threats to this critical phase of one's life.

At age 18, there is so much to celebrate. College acceptance, prom, and graduation are just a few common examples. Parents of young adults have no shortage of pride as they watch their sons and daughters blossom into young adults.

Unfortunately, as we all know, alcohol also creeps its way into these celebratory times. In some cases, regardless of the legal drinking age, both parents and young adults feel that drinking is a right of passage. Many feel that alcohol is a necessary component to a celebration. Generally, underage drinking is accepted as a norm.

Research, however, paints a much uglier picture of underage alcohol use. According to a study conducted by Johns Hopkins University, early alcohol consumption by some young people statistically places them at a high risk for lifelong alcohol dependence. College students are at the highest risk, as 80 percent of college students participate in underage drinking.

The potential outcome of underage drinking is seldom positive. Annually, about 5,000 people under age 21 die from alcohol-related injuries involving underage drinking. Also, underage drinking can lead to absenteeism, memory loss, and health problems.

My advice to young men and women is simple: Avoid underage drinking despite the peer pressure that surrounds you.

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