

# Steer underage loved ones away from use of alcohol

Although the title of county prosecutor escalated me to the position of chief law enforcement officer in Somerset County 22 months ago, my role in the Soriano household during that period has remained "chiefly" unchanged.

As a husband of 20-plus years and father of twin 14-year-olds with an array of responsibilities that typically accompany those positions, I try my best to help configure my kids' moral navigation systems in a fashion that will permit them to stay on a course toward success as people.

Nothing would make me prouder than to hear that the defining traits of the developing personalities of my son and daughter are those of integrity, fairness, compassion, and objectivity.

An essential part of my "paternal protocol" is the use of real-life examples to demonstrate the consequences of poor decision making. No doubt, we learn from our mistakes as well as from those of others.

My occupational setting affords me a ringside seat to some of the most tragic choices made by young people in our area. Rest assured, no names are identified, and no confidences are breached. However, I do relay essential facts of actual youthful transgressions to my son and daughter, and we discuss the ensuing penalties as well as the collateral consequences of the conduct.

A great number of those unfortunate decisions are, in some way, linked to underage consumption of alcohol. In New Jersey, with limited exception, those under 21 who choose to consume alcoholic beverages do so in violation of the law.

Nonetheless, young people and, in many cases, adults continue to consider underage consumption of alcohol a deep-rooted and ceremonial rite of passage into adulthood. While it may be illegal, underage drinking is, indeed, prevalent.

*The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* labeled underage alcohol consumption "a widespread and persistent public health and safety problem that creates serious personal, social, and economic consequences for adolescents, their families, communities, and the Nation as a whole."

Statistics can be mind-numbing, but the numbers are eye-opening. Among other things, studies have shown that about 10 percent of 9- and 10-year-olds have started to drink alcohol; one-third of young people begin to drink before age 13; and during the past 30 days, 26 percent of individuals between 12 and 20 years of age used alcohol. Short- and long-term consequences of underage drinking can be debilitating.

There are enough obstacles that challenge our youth these days. Please make it a point to steer your underage loved ones away from alcohol consumption, and, thereby, help them attain success. And remember, even a single instance of poor judgment can eliminate a lifetime of opportunities.



When scanned with a smart phone, this QR code will take users directly to a page on the EmPOWER Somerset website listing local cab companies with the areas they serve, hours of operation and phone numbers.

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