

**CFS Parent Forum on Teen  
Drinking October 12, 2011**

# Agenda

- **Why do teens drink? What options do parents have?**  
Chris Jackson will talk about factors that contribute to teen risk behaviors and about options for prevention.
- **A recent party: Parents' perspective.** Parents involved in or affected by a recent party that led to the alcohol poisoning of one teen will share their lessons learned.
- **Do we want an anti-drinking norm in the CFS community? What ideas do we have to create and support this norm?** Scottie Seawell, Chris and Carrie will facilitate a discussion that we hope will lead to “action steps” that parents in the CFS

# What Makes Teen Drinking Risky?

# It can lead to alcohol poisoning

- Alcohol poisoning is usually the result of binge drinking, defined as drinking five or more drinks in a row. (This definition of binge drinking applies to 170 lb. males).
- A large dose of alcohol depresses nerves that control involuntary actions such as breathing and the gag reflex.

# What Can Happen to Someone With Alcohol Poisoning?

- Victim chokes on his or her own vomit.
- Breathing slows, becomes irregular, or stops.
- Heart beats irregularly or stops.
- Hypoglycemia; leads to seizures.
- Untreated severe dehydration from vomiting can cause seizures, permanent brain damage, or

# Alcohol poisoning is **just 1** result of teen drinking.

Teen drinking....

- increases use of marijuana, other drugs
- increases academic problems in high school
- increases the odds of alcohol abuse in college
- increases exposure to inter-personal violence

# Alcohol poisoning is **just 1** result of teen drinking.

- Teen drinking also increases the odds of high risk sexual behaviors (multiple partners; unprotected sex; date rape) and their consequences (STDs; pregnancies; trauma).
- Alcohol has a toxic effect on the brain cells of adolescents—because their brain cells are still developing. Alcohol can damage normal growth in regions of the brain important for judgment, critical thinking and memory—regions that do not fully mature until the mid-20s.

**There are no known benefits to underage drinking.**

# Why Do Teens Drink?



# Primary Contributing Factors

Four key contributing factors....

Family Norms

Promotion

Opportunity

Adolescent Brain

# Family Norms Can Increase the Risk

- Absence of clear & firm parent expectations and rules against child/teen alcohol use.
- “Priming” children for later risky use by allowing low level alcohol use during childhood (usually starts as sipping others’ drinks and progresses to allowing watered down drinks, celebratory drinks).

# Family Norms Can Increase the Risk

- Parents believing that teen drinking is inevitable (disengaged parenting).
- No negative consequences for drinking.
- Parental modeling of alcohol **mis**use (e.g., modeling use of alcohol for mood regulation and/or for getting drunk).

# An Alcohol Industry that Promotes Underage Drinking

## Alcopops...



## Energy drinks...



*"For people who don't like the taste of alcohol, it is a way to get drunk without the bad taste."*



*"I think that teenagers are more likely to drink Mike's Hard Lemonade than a 20-year-old would be. Just because of the taste. It's more sweet."*

# An Alcohol Industry that Promotes Underage Drinking



# Opportunity = Access to Alcohol

- Alcohol that can be taken and not missed from home.
- Alcohol provided by older siblings or older friends willing to buy.
- Alcohol provided by parents, other adults.

# Opportunity = Parental Tolerance

- Parents who provide a “safe” environment for teen drinking.
- Parents who are unable or unwilling to control a teen gathering.
- Parents who don't want to know what their teen(s) are up to.

# The Teen Brain => Is Not Ready to Regulate Risk

“The teenage brain is like a Ferrari: It's sleek, shiny, sexy, and fast, and it corners really well. But it also has really crappy brakes. Here's what's going on under the hood....”

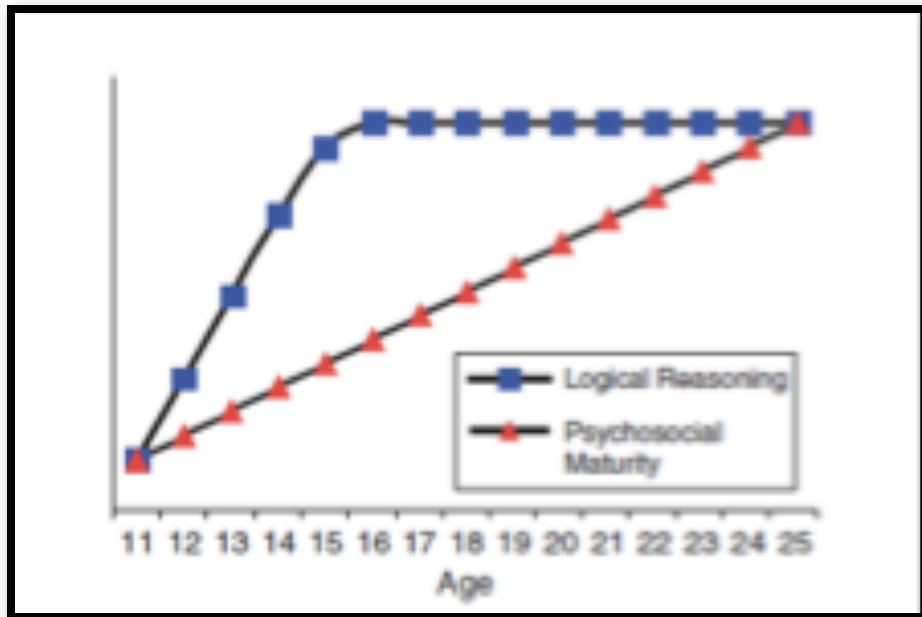
Judith Newman, Ph.D.



# Brain Networks Govern Behavior

- Outer areas of the brain (prefrontal cortex and linked cortical areas) control our **logical reasoning** abilities — including our abilities to think ahead, weigh risks vs. benefits, make complex plans.
- Inner areas of the brain (the limbic and para-limbic areas) control our **social-emotional** abilities — including our abilities to regulate emotions, control impulses, resist peer influences, delay gratification.

# Normal Brain Development



- Brain areas that govern logical reasoning abilities are not altered by puberty; capacity for logical reasoning reaches adult levels by age 16.
- Brain areas that govern social-emotional abilities are “remodeled” during puberty; these areas and the abilities they govern don’t mature until young

# Brain Development:

## Implications for Risk Taking

- It takes both logical reasoning and social-emotional maturity to make good decisions in risky situations.
- By age 25, these two regions are fully mature and highly integrated; this is not the case during adolescence.
- When teens' social-emotional network is not highly activated (as when they are alone or with family), the cognitive-control (logical reasoning) network is generally strong enough to control impulsive behavior, even in

# Brain Development:

## Implications for Risk Taking

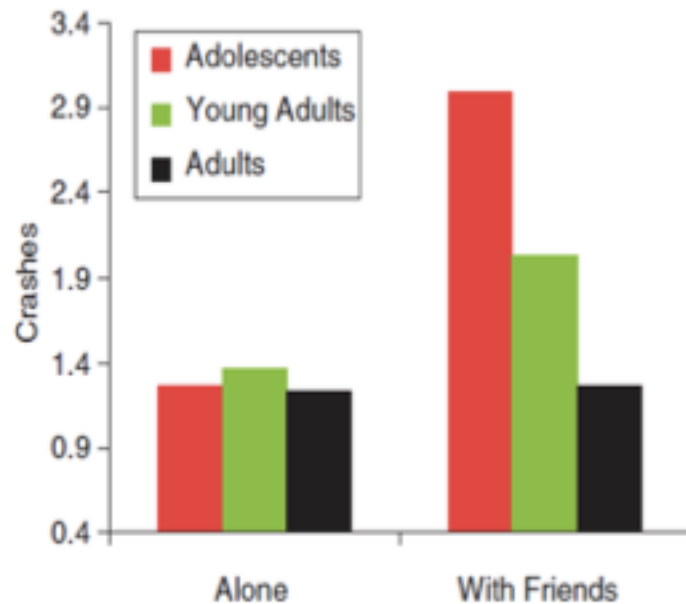
- When teens are with peers, the social-emotional network is generally highly activated.
- When teens' social-emotional network is highly activated, it has the capacity to override the area of the brain that governs logical reasoning.
- In other words, the system that is **least mature** is largely in charge of teens' behaviors when they are engaged socially and/or emotionally with peers.
- Nutshell: Peers => rev up social-emotional

# When the social-emotional network is in control....

- My son and some friends went to the window of a girl they know and inadvertently set off a burglar alarm. When a police squad car came, they panicked and fled. When I found out, I said, “Do you realize that you were running from armed police officers who thought they were interrupting a break-in? What were you thinking?” He said, “That’s the problem, I wasn’t.”

(Source: Dr. Laurence Steinberg, developmental psychologist who studies teen brain)

# When the social-emotional network is in control....



**Fig. 2.** Risk taking of adolescents, young adults, and adults during a video driving game, when playing alone and when playing with friends. Adapted from Gardner & Steinberg (2004).

- Being with peers increases risk-taking substantially among teens, moderately among college-aged individuals, and not at all among adults.

# When the social-emotional network is in control....



# Implications: Teen Brain & Alcohol Use

- It is naïve to hope that allowing teens to drink at home with parents will teach them to be “responsible” drinkers. This objective loses all meaning when teens are with peers.
- The thrill is the thing: Teens drink to get drunk with their friends.
- Teens who “know better” are at greatly increased risk of drinking if with friends who are drinking.



# Implications: Teen Brain & Future Alcohol Use

- Adolescents' brain chemistry is tuned to be highly responsive to everything in their environment. If psychoactive substances are used, those substances are tapping into a much more robust habit-forming ability in adolescents compared to adults.

(Source: Frances Jensen, pediatric neurologist).

- High school binge drinking is the strongest predictor of future binge drinking. Teens who binge drink in high school have a 5-fold increase in their odds of weekly binge

# What Options Do Parents Have?

# Change Family Norms

- **Family.** Set and enforce family norms that convey zero tolerance for underage drinking, in any amount, starting in childhood.
- **Family.** Be bold: Communicate your anti-drinking norms to relatives and other parents; let your kids hear you do this.

# Eliminate Opportunities

- **Opportunity.** Cut the supply: Prevent teens from having easy access to alcohol at home or from outside sources.
- **Opportunity.** Friendship choices matter: Don't allow your teen to spend unsupervised time with high risk peers .
- **Opportunity.** Use a buddy system: Parents can work together by agreeing to co-chaperone social events and to step in together when there's a problem.

# Eliminate Opportunities

- **Opportunity.** Assess. Are teens drinking when they get together at your home? If you don't check, you won't know.
- **Opportunity.** Ask: Find out about teen social events from other parents before you let your teen go: Who's going to be there? Are adults in control? Do they need help?
- **Opportunity.** Advise: Share warnings or after-the-fact information about drinking (or drug) situations with other parents.
- **Opportunity.** Assure anonymity. Don't share with your teen the identity of parents who share information with you. Anonymity protects teens from "fall out" that can happen when teens who are told which-parents-said-

Remember that you're dealing with a young person whose brain is not like yours.

- **Teen brain.** Remember that teens are not fully equipped to curtail high risk behaviors in social situations in which peers but not adults are present.
- **Teen brain.** Substance use education programs don't work because they rely on logical reasoning about risk. Preventing teen risk behaviors requires limiting opportunities for immature judgment.

# A Recent Party: Parents' Lessons Learned

It really is up to us.

Do we want an anti-drinking  
norm in the CFS community?

**What ideas do we have to  
create and support this norm?**