



## *It's the Holidays – Are your Boundaries with the Alcoholic/Addict Wrapped up Tight?*

**By Carole Bennett, MA**

Well, here we are again with the holidays just around the corner.

During this time of year, people look for guidance in how to establish and secure their boundaries with their loved one whether it is a family member or friend. Though it is your utmost desire for all to have a joyous and memorable holiday, you will be more comfortable and confident if you keep in mind that YOU are in control, not the alcoholic/addict. This active role on your part has you establishing fair, yet concrete

boundaries well before the scheduled event.

Pick boundaries that are important to you and MUST be adhered to by the alcoholic/addict. Keep it simple, doable, short and to the point. There is no need to defend yourself regarding your decisions and if you don't engage and stay neutral you will be perceived as having a plan that is well thought out and ensures self respect.

Please don't bring up old examples of how the alcoholic/addict let you

down in the past, because doing so might provoke an argument which serves no purpose.

Like with any boundary, it must be accompanied with clear ramifications if those conditions are not met. IMPORTANT...make sure that you both understand what those consequences are, so no one can dispute a misunderstanding or feigned ignorance as to the intention of the plan. In addition, it might be a good idea to tell other family members what that arrangement is, so everyone is on the same page and there can be no surprises.

Here are some simple, respectful boundaries that you might want to consider:

1. Arriving at the designated time, well groomed and dressed appropriately.



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# Binge Drinking Among Young Adults

By Heather Ward, MSW, LSW

Teenagers and young adults look at drinking alcohol as a rite of passage; as something that is normal and acceptable.

Two recent reports seem to underscore this problem, the 2009 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and the 2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The findings of these reports are unsettling! The reports found that:

- One in four high school students not only consume alcohol, but consume a lot of alcohol in a short period of time in the act known as binge drinking. *The definition of binge drinking is the consumption of four or more drinks in a row for a woman or five or more drinks in a row for a man., in a short period of time.*
- Almost two in three high school students who admit to drinking alcohol also binge drink.
- From 1993 to 2009, the prevalence of binge drinking decreased among high school boys, but has remained about the same among high school girls.

It's easy for high school students and young adults to get caught up in a social scene where they face lots of peer pressure. Inevitably, one of the biggest areas of peer pressure is drinking. The reports indicate that

among the reasons teens drink alcohol are: curiosity, to 'feel good or feel older,' and lack of physical and/or emotional controls.

Teens that binge drink put themselves and others at risk of car crashes, violence, HIV transmission and sexually transmitted diseases, and unplanned pregnancy.

The reports go on to note that individuals who binge drink on a regular basis are at risk for serious future health concerns. Having the attitude of living in the present and thinking that, "I have nothing to worry about; nothing is going to happen to me" can lead to liver and/or heart disease, stroke and certain cancers.

People who start consuming alcohol before the age of 15 are five times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin drinking at age 21 or older (cdc.gov).



Excessive alcohol use remains the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States and leads to a wide range of health and social problems. More than 79,000 deaths occur each year as a result of alcohol consumption. Which is why NCADD of Middlesex implements a variety of programs designed to educate parents, educators, and other adults that they can be a strong influence in a young person's life.

Some good news though. The *Monitoring the Future (MTF)* study released December 14th found that alcohol use has continued to decline among high school seniors and alcohol binge drinking declining from 25.2% to 23.2%.

NCADD makes available brochures and videos that enable adults to know the facts on underage drinking and providing them with the tools they need so they can save youngsters' lives. By delivering programs directly to students we are able to further communicate the facts about the dangers of binge drinking and empower them to walk away from their first drink.

Sources:

- [kidshealth.org/teen/drug\\_alcohol/alcohol/binge\\_drink.html#](http://kidshealth.org/teen/drug_alcohol/alcohol/binge_drink.html#)
- [www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm)
- [www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns](http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns)

# Youngsters and Marijuana; Dangerous Trends

By Dara Jarosz, MA, SAC

A recently released study suggests that teens are smoking marijuana at increasingly younger ages; even prior to the teen years.

The study, conducted by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, found that 7.3 percent of all people ages 12 and older have experimented with marijuana. This is a nine-percent increase over previous findings.

Additionally, the *Monitoring the Future (MTF)* study released December 14th found that daily Marijuana use increased among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders from 2009 to 2010. The same survey also noted that Marijuana use is now ahead of cigarette smoking on some measures (due to decreases in smoking and recent increases in marijuana use).

Sadly, these numbers may be under reported since many professionals feel that these numbers are actually higher since new laws make it nearly impossible to survey students.

## What this means for those young people who may be experimenting?

Kids and teen are often unaware, and sometimes unconcerned with their brain development. This extraordinary organ is extremely complex and contains billions of cells performing fine-tuned

communications. Drug use, even once, disrupts the well balanced system especially in younger people whose brain is not fully developed.

During the adolescent years a human brain is still maturing, with significant changes continuing into the early 20's.

According to a study done at McLean Hospital in Belmont, individuals who experimented with marijuana as teens and preteens were more likely to be easily distracted, possess an inability to maintain focus, and to perform badly on cognitive tests.



Additionally, research shows that the earlier in life a person begins to experiment with drugs, the more likely they are to progress to a more serious addiction later in life. Some suggest that a teen who experiments during his formative years is at an increased vulnerability to other substances as well.

## Gateway Drug

Studies show that very few

young people use other drugs, without first trying marijuana. That is why marijuana has sometimes been called a 'gateway drug'. Users are more likely to go on to experiment with other substances such as cocaine. Although research has not fully explained this association, evidence suggests the risk of experimenting with cocaine is much greater for youth who have tried marijuana than those who have not. Biological, social, and psychological factors are also involved in this association.

## What parents can do?

It's never too early to start talking to your children about drugs. If you're not sure how to approach the situation, then ask for help.

Contact your school's Student Assistance Counselor for free and confidential advice. Or contact NCADD of Middlesex County. We offer free and confidential support and referral services in person, on the phone or through our online Helpline at [www.ncadd-middlesex.org](http://www.ncadd-middlesex.org). We also make available free literature and videos on this topic.

Sources:

- <http://www.nida.nih.gov/tib/marijuana.html>
- <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/MindMoodNews/smoking-pot-early-age-impair-brain-function/story?id=12152238>
- *Harvard Crimson*

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2. Being clean and sober is paramount to participation. If you smell alcohol on their breath or they act intoxicated or high you will not let them in, or if they live there, you will ask them to stay away from the festivities until the event is over.
3. A cheerful and kind demeanor is also an entry ticket as anger or a "woe is me"; chin on the buttons attitude is not welcome.

If they don't like your holiday rules and regulations, be committed to a response like "That makes me sad that you won't be joining us, but that's your choice." They now have to shoulder all the responsibility for their decision even though they may try to blame you.

Holidays can be wonderful and fun, but they are certainly more enjoyable if there is warmth and love, coupled with respect and dignity toward each other.

*Carole Bennett, MA is a family substance abuse counselor and a staff blogger on addiction and recovery for the Huffington Post. Her new book "Reclaim Your Life – You and the Alcoholic/Addict" has just been published. Please visit her websites at [www.familyrecoveryolutions.com](http://www.familyrecoveryolutions.com) and [www.reclaimyourlifebook.com](http://www.reclaimyourlifebook.com) for more information.*

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit, community-based health organization providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies since 1980.

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