

Survey says most parents 'clueless' on teen drinking

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Just under 60 percent of Livonia ninth-grade students reported drinking once in the previous year, according to a 2007 survey presented at a Town Hall meeting Thursday on underage drinking with the Livonia Save Our Youth task force.

Other statistics showed that 69 percent of ninth-graders said that they rode in a car where someone had been drinking and 22 percent had participated in binge drinking.

And more than 90 percent of the students think their parents are clueless about underage drinking.

Those were just some of the results from the survey reported by Bob Douvill, student assistance counselor at Franklin High School, and Kathy Weaver, student assistance counselor at Churchill High School.

The task force discussed how the use of alcohol is risky for teens.

Dr. Mark Menestrina, a task force member, cited statistics that revealed that drinkers who started younger than 14 were seven times more likely to be in an accident than those who waited until they were 21. That same group was four and a half times more likely to develop drug or alcohol problems and three times more likely to attempt suicide.

Menestrina, a physician, also reminded the audience of the controversial T-shirts worn last year by students with the words "Pusching it to the Limit" (a word play on Busch beer) and "Class of .08." Many parents were concerned, but others remained indifferent, Menestrina said. "Some adults thought there was a problem, then shortly thereafter there was an accident involving alcohol that involved a death, changing many lives forever," Menestrina said.

Michelle Moccia, a nurse who works in the emergency room at St. Mary Mercy Hospital, said she and her colleagues see all ages in the ER resulting from underage drinking.

Drinkers increase the risk of injury or death, she said. "We see fractures, they lose their teeth, and they often don't realize how badly they are hurt," Moccia said. "Thank God for their friends who bring them in. We'll tell them, 'You saved their life.' We're so glad because we can hydrate them. Their heart can stop or they can stop breathing."

Livonia police Officer Jim King and Monte Banks, a school resource officer, said they work closely with the schools. Banks said parents can help by getting more involved in their children's lives. "Why are they allowed to go out at night without any questions?" Banks asked.

The officers also reminded the audience that if parents or guardians don't take reasonable steps to keep alcohol out of the hands of teenagers in their own homes, they can be charged with a misdemeanor and a \$500 fine.

The Livonia Police Department also offers a Parent Evaluation Resource kit, which includes testing kits for a parent's own personal use with their children. "The idea is not to catch a kid, the idea is to make the parents less clueless," Banks added.

The task force also heard from four young adults who discussed their teenage drinking. "It's very prevalent," said one of them. "(Alcohol) is easy to find. There's older friends over 21 and parents allow it."

"Where there's a will, there's a way. If you want to get a drink, you will get it," said another.

They reminded the students in the crowd that they are not alone. "Surround yourself with positive people," one of them said.

Claudia Rushlow, a state-certified preventive specialist and family advocate at Maplegrove in West Bloomfield, told the audience "be a parent, not a pal."

Rushlow said parents could take steps to ensure children aren't drinking in their home. When children say they are going to a classmate's home, make the call to the other parent, Rushlow said. "And when other parents call, welcome the phone calls."

"Talk to your teens daily," she said. "Consider your teen's temperament. Meet your children's new friends and parents when their environment changes."

"Help your child with a plan of action in handling risky situations. Help them develop a strategy. Please do not wait until they are failing at school or are in trouble to intervene."

Rushlow told parents to check their child's vehicles. Drugs and alcohol use often evolve around car usage, she said. "Cars can be used as storage unit or bedrooms," she said.

"Make sure you have a key," Rushlow said. "If you're suspicious, show up where they're supposed to be."

The Livonia Task Force welcomes new members. For information, visit www.saveouryouthtaskforce.com.