



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES: Media Toolkit

Overview & Table of Contents

To assist in your outreach efforts, the “Talk. They Hear You.”[®] communications team has developed this media toolkit for your use. This series of turnkey materials can be used with media outlets, stakeholders, and others to spread the word about the campaign, increase use of campaign information and resources, and encourage conversations with young people to prevent underage drinking and substance use.

Available for review and, in many cases, tailoring and editing are the following:

- A. Key Messages & Talking Points
- B. News Release Template: Announcing Local Launch of Campaign
- C. Opinion Piece Template
- D. Letter to the Editor Template
- E. Newsletter Blurbs
- F. Step by Step: How to Pitch a Story to TV
- G. Public Service Announcement Outreach
- H. Social Media Outreach Best Practices

Wherever appropriate, step-by-step instructions are provided with the materials. Because each community is unique, the materials can be easily tailored to meet your specific needs. Should you have any questions about these materials and how best to use them, the “Talk. They Hear You.”[®] communications team is available to assist you.

Contact: “Talk. They Hear You.”[®] campaign, Underage.Drinking@samhsa.gov





A. Key Messages & Talking Points

The messages and talking points provided below communicate key facts about underage drinking and substance use, the consequences of use, and how the “Talk. They Hear You.”[®] campaign is providing information and resources for parents and caregivers to address these issues with young people. These messages and talking points can serve as the foundation for all communications—whether interviews with reporters, news releases, e-newsletter articles, tweets, or Facebook posts.

Underage Drinking and Substance Use Are Serious Problems

Underage Drinking

Some kids start drinking at a young age—Many young people start drinking before the age of 15. A quarter of teens ages 14–15 said they have tried alcohol at some time in their lives, and the proportion increases to 44 percent for teens ages 16–17.

Alcohol can affect brain function—Alcohol use can permanently impair brain function by affecting the actual physical development of the brain structure. Negative effects include decreased ability in planning, executive functioning, memory, spatial operations, and attention.

Alcohol can lead to other substance use—Alcohol use is associated with a greater likelihood of using other substances, including marijuana and tobacco.

Marijuana

Marijuana can harm adolescent brain development—Marijuana use distorts how adolescent minds perceive the world, causing poor judgment and decision-making—e.g., having unprotected sex and driving while intoxicated. Marijuana use can cause a lack of balance and coordination, increasing injury risk for activities such as driving and sports. It is also linked to earlier onset of psychosis in youths known to be at risk for schizophrenia.

Marijuana is addictive—One in six young people who use marijuana before the age of 18 become addicted.

Marijuana use can lead to use disorder—Recent data suggest that 30 percent of those who use marijuana may have some degree of marijuana use disorder.

Marijuana has negative health consequences—The compounds in marijuana can [affect the circulatory system](#) and may increase the risk of [heart attacks](#) and [strokes](#). Smoking marijuana can lead to a greater risk of bronchitis, cough, and phlegm production. Marijuana users are significantly more likely than nonusers to [develop chronic mental disorders](#), including schizophrenia.



Opioids

Prescription pain medication can be addictive—Even if a doctor prescribes opioids there are still risks when taking them, including addiction and death. In 2018, an estimated 10.3 million people age 12 or older reported having misused opioids in the previous year.

Misusing prescription pain medication is unsafe and illegal—It is illegal to take a prescription medication without a doctor’s prescription. Taking prescription medications that aren’t prescribed to you (even just one time) can land you in the hospital or even cause death.

Mixing prescription medication with alcohol can be fatal—Mixing opioids with other substances can cause dangerous side effects, including breathing trouble, coma, and even permanent brain damage or death.

The Consequences of Underage Drinking and Substance Use Can Be Devastating

The consequences of underage drinking and substance use can include:

- Injury or death from accidents;
- Unintended, unwanted, and unprotected sexual activity;
- Mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety disorders;
- Difficulty with attention, concentration, problem-solving, learning, and memory; and/or
- Allergic reactions, breathing trouble, coma, and even permanent brain damage or death.

Underage Drinking and Substance Use Are Not Top-of-Mind Concerns Among Many Parents

- Many parents with children under the age of 21 don’t believe underage drinking and substance use are issues to be concerned about and may not have conversations with their kids surrounding these topics.
- Research suggests that one of the most influential factors for a child’s healthy development is a strong, open relationship with a parent.
- Parents have a significant influence on their children’s decisions to experiment with alcohol or other drugs.
- Over 80 percent of young people ages 10–18 say their parents are the leading influence on their decision about whether to drink alcohol.
- When parents create supportive and nurturing environments, children make better decisions.
- The “Talk. They Hear You.”[®] campaign is designed to provide parents and caregivers with the information and resources they need to properly address underage drinking and substance use with their children.