

Christopher Townsend, Ph.D.

What is binge drinking?

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We think about excessive drinking in a short period of time. For women, within two hours, if you've had four or more drinks, we would consider that binge drinking. For men, five or more drinks in a two hour period. We would consider that to be binge drinking. And we know that oftentimes, young people, children, college age students are drinking more than that, particularly in a social setting where there's a party, they're chugging alcohol. They're having these games that they're playing. And so they get way more alcohol in their system than the body can metabolize in a period that it could normally do with a small amount of alcohol. So it creates a potentially dangerous time for a young person who's over indulged in alcohol.

What are the effects of binge drinking?

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It becomes more severe over time as they continue to engage in that behavior. And so it starts out with minor problems. And with continued engagement in those excessive ways, it actually changes the brain, and the brain becomes dependent on that activity. And so it changes moods. It changes obligations in the way that they get about in the world. So where they once had a commitment to things, they may not have that same commitment. So now they're developing a relationship with the substance and in extreme severe phases of the process. And so what we want to do is intervene as soon as we can, as early as we can. And as soon as we know that there could be a potential problem, the earlier we intervene, the more likely the outcome will be positive for that young person.

Why are these conversations important to have with children long before they are faced with these situations?

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In the world, There's a lot of misinformation out there. Our children talk to one another, and they don't have all the context for that information. That information doesn't come with truth, always and wisdom, of safety and care. And so I want to make sure that they have the real truth about what different substances will do to your body, what alcohol will do.

How can someone avoid falling into peer pressure in a situation that could lead to binge drinking?

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You know, this social peer pressure thing of everyone's doing it, and if you're not doing it, something is wrong with you. and you're not cool. you're not in the in crowd. and developmentally, when you consider that age group, you know, even younger, but let's just talk about 12 to 18, or even 21. You want to be accepted. All of us, even beyond that. We want to be

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accepted. But the older you get, the less power it tends to have over you. But at that age developmentally, that is one of the most important factors of life is to be in the popular crowd and to be accepted, be it social media or in person. And so that carries a lot of weight with our young people. And so if your child is going to the party- and they are going to the party, particularly if they're in college- then helping them how to blend in without actually indulging. and that could be get the little red cup. Bring their own drink. And if they're at the party, always keep a drink in your hand, because generally in the parties, somebody's pouring, there's somebody saying go over there and get it. But if you already have something in your cup, I think that is one of the best strategies. Or the better strategy would be go to a party where you know it's not going to be. But in a college setting, it's inevitable. It's all around you. So you have to know that and prepare yourself not to fall for some of the traps that will happen in those social environments where there's a lot of pressure. come on, try this. come on, do this. it will not hurt you. Well, this person may have been doing this a long time. And the potency of whatever they're using, they may have developed a tolerance to it. And if you do it, and you are virgin to that, you may not have the same experience, and it could potentially be dangerous for you. And it could be potentially harmful. But these are some of the ways. one great way that I teach often is if you really don't want to do that, but you really have to go to the party, Just blend in with your own water, a Coke, or whatever. And just tell folks No, I already have a drink. And that will help you.

Anything else to add?

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Sometimes in our denial and our having fun, we lose everything. being innocent and not knowing and so I just want all young people to know their lives are too important to risk it.