



Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula®
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES
Clint Eastwood Youth Program



Driving under the influence

Your teenager is getting his or her driver's permit/license and is ecstatic. You:

- Take your teen out to practice.
- Teach the rules of the road and courteous driving behavior.
- Emphasize traffic safety.
- Your teen takes the mandatory driving course.
- And, hopefully, you talk with your teen about not drinking and driving — as well as not riding with someone who's been drinking alcohol.

Many of us neglect to talk to our teens specifically about driving under the influence of marijuana and other recreational drugs or prescription medications. But, like alcohol, marijuana and other illicit drugs impair the skills needed for good driving — alertness, concentration, and quick reaction time. The effects of drugs and alcohol can last for hours after using.

Teens are the least experienced drivers and therefore have a higher risk than most of being involved in an accident, even without the complication of drugs or alcohol. Their ability to avoid other impaired drivers or poor road conditions is also limited under the best of circumstances, due to inexperience.

The dangers of “Just one more for the road”

“Have one [drink] for the road” was, until recently, a common phrase in American culture. But now we recognize the very real dangers associated with drunk driving. We now know:

- Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death among 15- to 20-year-olds.
- High school students are more likely to drink, smoke cigarettes, and smoke marijuana during the period immediately after earning their drivers' licenses. Teen driving behaviors become *riskier* with more driving experience.
- In 2004, 12.7 percent of high school seniors reported driving under the influence of

marijuana, and 13.2 percent reported driving under the influence of alcohol in the two weeks prior to completing the survey.

- Drugs other than alcohol (e.g., marijuana and cocaine) are involved in about 18 percent of motor vehicle driver deaths.
- An alcohol-related motor vehicle crash kills someone in the United States every 31 minutes and injures someone every 2 minutes.
- Each year, alcohol-related crashes in the United States cost about \$51 billion.
- Male drivers were nearly twice as likely as female drivers to have driven under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the previous year (22 percent compared with 11.4 percent).
- It is estimated by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) that most drinking-and-driving episodes go undetected. NHTSA estimates that only 15 percent of all drivers involved in fatal crashes have their blood alcohol content tested.

What can parents do?

- Talk to your kids about the risks of riding with someone who is driving while under the influence of any substance. (Specifically mention alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, and any other substances you think your teen might be using or tempted to try.)
- Discuss the physical effects of using these substances: difficulty judging distances, difficulty concentrating, slowed response time when something unexpected happens, slowed reactions to signals and sounds on the road.
- Remind your kids never to get in a car with someone who has been using drugs or drinking. Help them create a “backup plan” (calling you or a friend for a ride, walking, taking the bus, having money for a cab, etc.). Encourage them to call you so you can pick them up.
- Familiarize yourself with how drug education is being taught in your local schools and how your children and their friends view drug/alcohol use.
- Talk with other adults about safety issues and alcohol and drug use.
- Stay involved, supervise activities, have clear rules.

Remember, 60 percent of teens who drive say their parents have the most influence on their driving. And one in three high school students in the survey reported that they “want to” or “need to” spend more time with their parents.

This information is brought to you by Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula's Clint Eastwood Youth Program, providing a structured program to treat drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental health problems.

For more information or to schedule a free screening, please call **373-0924 or 800-528-8080**



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