

Sex Talk

Promoting Sexual Health for Youth

Editor's note

It is well known that the irresponsible use of alcohol can result in sexual harm with serious consequences to physical and emotional health.

Here in Grey-Bruce, irresponsible use of alcohol is a concern. Higher than average rates of binge drinking among both teens and adults are reported. Underage drinking and drinking as a purposeful activity are accepted by many as "the way things are".

Sexual activity is often initiated during adolescence - a time of risk-taking, experimentation and needing to fit in with perceived peer group norms.

Media influences connect sexual desirability to alcohol use. Gender issues increase the complexity. This issue of Sex Talk raises awareness of the facts and implications of the sex-alcohol-youth combo. It hopes to provide some practical strategies and resources for those of us who work with youth.



Sex and Youth and Alcohol

It's during adolescence that most youth face making decisions about alcohol use and about sex. Enhancing the ability of our teens to make healthy decisions about each of these, much less the alcohol-sex combo, can be challenging.

Ellie Jenks of **CHOICES** says that many of the teen girls she sees are anxious about the possibility of STDs and pregnancy because condoms don't get used when there is a lot of drinking. "They also regret going as far, sexually, with a partner", she states. Jenks adds that a regrettable and/or scary sexual experience can be a motivator to look at drinking behaviours. Young women often suffer a loss of self-esteem as a result of feeling shame for their actions and/or the impact of the rumours that can result. "This doesn't seem to be an issue for the boys", she adds. "There's a huge difference in the way girls and guys think about alcohol and sex. It may help to separate them for some portions of group work in order to promote a more frank discussion."

Linda Lauder of the **Sexual Assault Centre** has found that attitudes about drinking and dating may become more insightful and responsible, especially in boys, as they mature and have opportunities to engage in learning activities. "Activities that assist them to challenge stereotypical 'macho' attitudes and pro sex and alcohol media messages can be quite effective", she states. "Many pre-teen girls can also benefit from involvement in activities that talk about self-esteem and healthy relationships."

Assertive communication skills need to be taught and reinforced regularly according to Lauder. Marcia Halliday of the **Sexual Assault Care Centre (S.A.C.C.)** agrees. "Teens need help with the actual words to say", she says emphatically. "This is my rule for me...I need to do this everytime, for me...it has nothing to do with you" is an example of such a script. These lines can be used when turning down a drink, or refusing the offer of a ride home", Halliday suggests.

Marcia Halliday and colleague Ruth Rigbey both agree that counselling gives teens an opportunity to explore the relationship between their alcohol use and their behaviour. If a teen is sexually assaulted when under the influence of alcohol, it is important that they recognize that they are not responsible for being sexually assaulted and that the amount of alcohol consumed may jeopardize their ability to keep themselves safe.

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The counsellors also noted the responsibility of teens for their own safety in situations where date rape drugs could be present. Rigbey comments "Teens need to be mindful of the potential use of date rape drugs in any situation. They are not used exclusively in alcoholic beverages. Learning safety skills can help teens protect themselves and each other."

Jenks agrees that safety awareness and skills are important for teens, but tough to make stick. "A teen who had previously decided to limit her drinking in order to be a safety buddy for a friend might get pressured into joining a drinking game, or might not be able to convince an intoxicated friend to keep herself safe", she explains. She also points out that house parties where parents are either not at home or tolerate or condone the alcohol use are not uncommon. "It's what is happening in a bedroom away from the main party, where teens who may be impaired and so less able to consider consequences, are drawn into riskier situations" she states.

Wendy Beckett, a Public Health Nurse in the **Health Unit's Sexual Health Program**, regularly sees adolescent clients who come for the Emergency Contraceptive Pill. Some share that the unprotected intercourse was also unplanned and happened while they were impaired. "This is a good opportunity to work with the client in some strategizing around alcohol and safety issues, as well as contraception and safer sex practices," says Beckett.

Sandy Maurice, a public health nurse involved with the **FOCUS**

(on Alcohol and Substance Abuse) Project, believes that harm reduction strategies are the way to go. "We know that just telling teens not to drink doesn't work." Maurice is enthused about 'Party Smart', a program that helps youth to develop policies for safe grads, proms and home parties. She explains that it "allows peers to work together to come up with their own strategies for risk reduction around alcohol use. This way they're more likely to use them." Maurice thinks that most teens are aware of the potential for sexual harm as well as other forms of violence and injury with irresponsible drinking. "Teens who took part in 'The Drinking Game' contest produced excellent posters and poems frankly depicting these themes. These youth in turn have a real impact on other local youth who know them. "The local hook is very important," she adds, "and needs to be repeated often. 'The Drinking Game' display is very well received too."

Donna Beatty of the **Centre for Mental Health and Addiction**, believes that the Grade 1 - 10 school health curricula, which had local input, will pay off in terms of helping children and youth develop responsible attitudes about alcohol. "This is a very complex issue," she states, "involving parenting skills, challenging community norms, media responsibility, education—all of us. We have to work at this from every angle we can and be careful about being youth positive when we do."

The Facts About Sex and Alcohol

- **46% of teens 15-19 years old in Grey-Bruce report having had intercourse at least once**
- **76% of young women having sex for the first time do not use contraceptives if they are drinking**
- **alcohol is a factor in 60% of all sexually transmitted diseases including HIV; students are less likely to use condoms when having sex after drinking than when sober**
- **a 1999 survey of Ontario students in grades 7 - 13 found that 67.5% reported drinking during the previous 12 months; teens in Grey-Bruce report drinking 2 or more times per month at a rate 47% higher than the provincial average**
- **42.4% of students in Ontario in grades 7 - 13 said they consumed 5 or more drinks on a single occasion, i.e. binge drinking**
- **teen binge drinking in Grey-Bruce is 38% higher than the Ontario average**
- **teen binge drinkers appear to engage in more unplanned sexual activity and to abandon safer sex practices more often than those who don't binge drink**
- **90% of rapes among young people involve alcohol use by the victim or the perpetrator**
- **females are more sensitive to alcohol than males; one drink for a woman can have the same effect as two drinks for a man**
- **alcohol is not a sexual stimulant - it lessens inhibitions making partners less nervous and possibly more sexually aggressive, but it is a depressant so can cause embarrassment about sexual performance.**

Date Rape Drugs

The two most common rape drugs, in addition to alcohol are **Rohypnol** and **G.H.B.** Others include **Ketamine** and **Halcion**.

- **Rohypnol (Flunitrazepam)**, *a.k.a. "roofies" ↓ ruffies"*
 - belongs to the Valium family of drugs but much more potent
 - smuggled into Canada through mail or delivery services
 - about \$2.00 - \$5.00 per 2mg. tablet
- **G.H.B. (Gamma Hydroxy-Butyrate)**, *a.k.a. "grievous bodily harm" or "liquid ecstasy"*
 - the dose causing amnesia is not much lower than the dose that can cause respiratory depression

Both of these drugs are more potent when taken with alcohol and are generally tasteless, colourless and odourless. Someone who has been slipped **Rohypnol** into their alcohol will appear intoxicated, excited or uninhibited to a level inconsistent with the amount of alcohol consumed. These effects, along with drowsiness, confusion and impaired motor skills, last 6-8 hours. Once the drug wears off, the person has little or no memory of the time spent under the drug's influence. *How scary is that?*



Staying Safe

- decide ahead of time to limit the alcohol you drink or to not use alcohol at all.
- don't leave your drink unattended-even briefly.
- only accept drinks from people you know and trust-including servers.
- bring your own beverages to a party, including soft drinks.
- have a solid plan for getting home safely.
- stay with people you know and trust at all times - including going to the washroom.
- trust your instincts.

WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE?

If alcohol decides when you have sex - you're at risk.
Decide about sex...Decide about drinking.

NO EXCUSES!

Watch for this health promotion campaign directed to college and highschool students and bar patrons.

Call 376-9420 Ext. 257 or 251, for more information.

According to the Sexual Assault Centre of Grey-Bruce, irresponsible drinking can set up a person to be a victim or perpetrator of sexual assault because excessive alcohol reduces one's ability to:

R realize what situations put you in danger.
A void and manage conflicts.
P erceive clearly the actions and intentions of others.
E stablish and communicate limits and wishes about sex.

Haze of Loss

*Pushing through distance and time,
Through the murk of stifled mind
Grasping towards the brink
Of reality preceding drink.*

*My thoughts lie jumbled
Marred, soiled, troubled
Actions of nights previous
Remain hidden and mysterious.*

*Mental retching with regret
Possibilities leading me to fret
Thinking of loved ones and friends
As I vow never again, never again.*

*Focus Project by Michelle Bourdon
"Drinking Game" Walkerton District Secondary
School*

Resources

- www.virtual-party.org/
- teens can learn about alcohol use and some of its consequences by attending this virtual party
- www.focus-alcohol.org
-Focus on Substance Abuse and Injury Prevention - Owen Sound and Brockton. For more information call the health unit at 376-9420 or 881-1920.
- CHOICES-see "Useful Phone Numbers" this page
- Sexual Assault Care Centre
-counselling post assault at 10 Grey-Bruce locations
-Dating Violence/Sexual Assault presentation to secondary school classes; call Ruth Rigbey 376-2121 Ext. 2458
- Sexual Assault Centre of Grey & Bruce
-counselling and education offered throughout Grey-Bruce including group and school presentations 369-6633
- Bruce-Grey Children's Services
-resource centre; parent support
Owen Sound 371-7034 Ext. 12
Walkerton 881-0110
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
371-6317

REFERENCES

1. Healthy Behaviours in Grey-Bruce-Huron-Perth, Feb,2001
2. Ontario Health Survey, 2000
3. 1998 Public Health Survey
4. Ontario Student Drug Use Survey. Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, 1999
5. Women's Health Matters, Sept. 2000
6. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Alcohol and Health Research World

Confidential and Youth Positive Sexual Health Clinics

- Grey Bruce Health Unit
- Owen Sound 376-9420
 - Walkerton 881-1920
 - Wiarton 797-2010

There are clinics at the following secondary schools:
Georgian Bay Secondary School - Meaford
John Diefenbaker Secondary School - Hanover
Grey Highlands Secondary School - Flesherton
Saugeen District Secondary School - Port Elgin
Kincardine District Secondary School -

Emergency Contraceptive Pill: E. C.P.

- ✧ 75 - 85% effective in preventing pregnancy after unprotected intercourse
- ✧ safe; no or low cost
- ✧ can be taken up to 72 hours after unprotected intercourse
- ✧ obtain from hospital emergency rooms, family doctors, sexual health clinics

Useful Phone Numbers For Youth

Sexual Health Program
Owen Sound.....376-9420
(toll free) 1-800-263-3456
Walkerton.....881-1920
(toll free) 1-800-821-7714
Southampton797-2010
(toll free) 1-800-230-7719

Crisis Intervention
Ask for Crisis Team
519-376-2121 or
1-888-525-0552

Sexual Assault Centre
24 Hour Helpline..
(toll free) 1-800-720-7411
Sexual Assault Care Centre
376-2121 Ext. 2458
CHOICES - Drug and
Alcohol Counselling for
Youth.
1-800-265-3133 or
519-371-5487
Kids Help Phone
1-800-668-6868

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To contribute ideas, comments or materials, contact Sue Askin, Sexual Health Program Manager, at 519-376-9420 (1-800-263-3456) or fax 519-376-7782. Our website is www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca



Grey Bruce Health Unit
Prevention is the Intention