

Laguna Beach Youth Alcohol & Substance Use Prevention

Creating Healthy Environments
for Youth of Laguna Beach
keepourkidssafier.org

This briefing offers an overview of widely accepted best practices for addressing alcohol and substance abuse in our community

Several years ago the Laguna Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) recognized the need to address the issue of underage alcohol and substance use. As a part of their strategic plan the Laguna Beach Community Coalition (LBCC) was established.

With input and guidance from 35 key stakeholders, parents, youth, and 15 community partners, coalition members researched best practices and evidence based strategies for substance abuse prevention to determine the direction of this initiative.

The coalition has identified three areas of focus for our work around alcohol & substance use prevention: improving problem solving skills for our youth; strengthening parent/child relationships; and reducing access to alcohol and other substances.

What's the Problem?

New survey results show local teen drinking rates are (7%) higher than the average in California. According to the Orange County Health Care agency report, Healthy Places, Healthy People local teens are engaging in high-risk drinking more than other youth in the State. Results of the 2010 California Healthy Kids Survey showed 35% of 9th graders and 48% of 11th grade students in Laguna Beach had consumed alcohol within the past 30 days. Underage drinking contributes to a wide range of costly health and social problems, including

motor vehicle crashes (the greatest single mortality risk for underage drinkers); suicide; interpersonal violence (e.g., homicides, assaults, rapes); unintentional injuries such as burns, falls, and drowning; brain impairment; alcohol dependence; risky sexual activity; academic problems; and alcohol and drug poisoning. (SAMHSA, 2011)



Binge Drinking and Related Problems

Teens experience a wide range of problems when they are involved with alcohol and binge drinking. Violence, including sexual assaults and fights, accidents, alcohol poisoning, increased likelihood of alcohol addiction associated with significant changes in brain chemistry and lowered school performance are a few of the issues directly connected to teen alcohol use. In addition, youth who drink before they turn age 15 are four times more likely to

develop alcohol addiction than those who start drinking at 21, according to the National Institute of Health.

Most kids have not yet developed the “cut off switch” that makes them go to sleep or pass out from too much drinking. They can consume dangerous amounts of alcohol before they realize it’s too late. This can result in alcohol poisoning, which can cause difficulty breathing, unconsciousness and death.

“We see the effects every day at Mission Hospital of drinking, underage and of-age, and many deaths. Approximately 25 to 40 percent of our trauma patients are alcohol related accidents. It’s about preventing deaths.”

Robert Winokur, Director of the emergency departments at Mission Hospital

Do Adults Have a Role?

It is a misconception to assume that all kids and young adults are going to drink anyway

Teens face a great deal of peer pressure to drink, however many teens choose not to drink and are often looking for a “way out”. It is important for adults to support youth and young adults in making healthy decisions. Youth are lower risk for developing problematic patterns of heavy drinking when they perceive that their parents maintain strong disapproval of alcohol and substance use throughout adolescence. (Martino, S.C., et al., Addictive Behaviors, 2009)

*Parents are encouraged and welcome to participate in our: **Parent Action Group on Youth Alcohol & Substance Use Prevention.** The intent of this PAG will be to work directly with parents in addressing alcohol and substance use of our Laguna Beach youth.*

YOU can be a part of the SOLUTION!

Many well-minded Laguna Beach residents often regard underage drinking as a “rite of passage”. This tolerance stems from three misconceptions:

Myth #1: Alcohol is a relatively harmless substance compared to illegal drugs.

Myth #2: Drinking is an inevitable activity for teens; it’s consumption is part of the transition to adulthood; and

Myth #3: Permitting consumption of alcoholic beverages in a residential setting is safer because impaired driving can be limited and some form of parental oversight is available in case of an emergency.

Access to Alcohol at House Parties

According to the Youth Access to Alcohol Study: Youth Survey Report 2006, 52% of youth report that the place they consumed alcohol was in a private home, usually a friend’s and 24% reported the last place was their own home.

When surveyed in 2010, 71% of Laguna Beach 11th graders and 74% of 9th graders said it is easy to obtain alcohol. (California Healthy Kids Survey, 2010).

Well-meaning parents often host drinking parties on behalf of their children, either in the belief they can control the amount of alcohol a teen consumes or because they consider teen drinking inevitable and that their supervision can ensure the safety of the children involved. Truth is, once revelers start drinking and the party begins to grow in size, it can quickly spiral out of control and lead to devastating consequences.

(<http://www.madd.org/underage-drinking/social-host/socialhostbroch.pdf>)

Parent Action Group members will have an opportunity to share their concerns and challenges related to youth alcohol/other drug use, learn skills to communicate with youth (including how to address difficult situations involving alcohol/substance use), and work together to create a positive and healthy environment for their children. This will be an ongoing committee facilitated by Mission Hospital staff. The group is intended to be action-oriented and designed to create positive results for our kids in Laguna. Contact us:

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“Many of the parties the youth attend have parents or adults hosting them and are well aware that they are serving alcohol or other substances to underage teens and they are accepting of this.”

*Safe Rides Coordinator
Mission Hospital Laguna Beach*

Tell Me about the Proposed Social Host Ordinance

Social Host Laws send a powerful message and have great potential for reducing youth alcohol access, and therefore when they are publicized and enforced, social host liability laws are recognized as effective practices by leading prevention and research institutions. (ARCHS, 2002).

The primary purpose of social host laws focused on hosting underage drinking parties is to deter parties, because these settings are associated with increased risk of binge-drinking and alcohol-related consequences.

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004).

The proposed social host ordinance for Laguna Beach is designed to prohibit persons from hosting an event on property under their control where underage youth are present and are being served or consuming alcohol or drugs. The law would provide exceptions for religious events and parent/child interaction.

The intent of this law is to prevent the negative consequences of underage drinking by limiting the access to alcohol and by holding those accountable who host or enable youth alcohol consumption on their property.

This Social Host Ordinance would hold someone responsible if they knowingly provide an envi-

ronment where underage drinking occurs. It will not add additional authority for any law enforcement officer or government official to enter a private property.

Police officials who receive a disturbance call would respond to the scene. If a party is taking place where minors can be seen drinking alcohol, police can proceed to take action under the Social Host Ordinance.

The penalty for a violation could consist of a fine as established by the City Council as well as increasing penalties for the second and third violation.

State law prohibits minors under age 21 from purchasing, possessing or consuming alcohol in public and prohibits adults from furnishing alcohol to minors in public.

The Social Host Ordinance closes the gap in state law since many youth obtain alcohol on private property, through social sources such as older friends, siblings, parents and/or strangers. This law will prevent underage drinking parties and hold the hosts of such parties accountable.

This ordinance would send a powerful message that our community strongly values our young people and wants to support a healthy environment for them to grow and thrive.



The ordinance would address the problem of underage drinking where it most frequently occurs—in homes and other private property. Underage drinking parties, even casual gatherings with just a few persons, can easily spiral out of control. A Social Host Ordinance is designed to protect youth and the community by doing the following:

Encourages parents and adults to avoid unsafe environments that foster high-risk, destructive behavior

Assist families in communicating and making healthy decisions

Provide underage youth with support to avoid peer pressure

Provide law enforcement an important tool to prevent tragedy and address the issue of underage drinking locally, not through an expensive court system

Reinforce a clear and consistent community-wide message that underage drinking is unhealthy, unsafe, and unacceptable

In the words of The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking, "Underage alcohol use is everybody's problem—and its solution is everybody's responsibility."

(Office of the Surgeon General, 2007)

You can make a Difference

Do Social Host Ordinances Reduce Teen Parties?



Yes. As a result of enforcement, San Diego Police Department saw a reduction in home party calls around San Diego State University when their ordinance went into effect, according to Detective Larry Darwent (*CARS, 2004*).

The proposed Laguna Beach Ordinance is designed as a prevention tool to stop parties where underage drinking is occurring by creating adult accountability without necessarily elevating the offense to the misdemeanor level which can carry a penalty of jail time. The Ordinance proposed by Police Chief Workman of the LBPB reflects current research recommendations from the Institute of Medicine (*IOM*) and National Research Council.

The IOM report recommends a greater emphasis on restricting access by strengthening laws and enacting ordinances that restrict youth access to alcohol in home parties. (*National Academy of Sciences*)

A strong ordinance for the Laguna Beach community is a sound strategy based on current national trends and is supported by our LBPB, PTA, School Board, MADD, B & G's Club of LB, NCADD-OC Western Youth Services, CSP, Community Alliance Network, ROP, and Mission Hospital.

Why Should I Support Policy Change?

Environmental prevention strategies focus on use of public policy to change the physical, social, and political context in which problem behaviors occur. Whether or how much adults and young people drink is shaped by community norms and expectations, as well as the access and availability of alcohol. Similar to the demonstrated success of reducing smoking by limit-

ing availability of tobacco and smoking in public places, the research on alcohol is clear: shifting norms and reducing access to alcohol impacts the rates of high-risk drinking in addition to related problems among youth and adults. The Social Host Ordinance is a powerful policy approach that our community can embrace to reduce underage binge drinking and related problems.

The Laguna Beach Community Coalition

Contact us at:

keepourkidssafer@gmail.com

Visit us at:

keepourkidssafer.org

As a resident, nonprofit or community group, here is how you can take action:

Write a letter of support and/or contact your City Council members to express support for the Social Host Ordinance

If you would like to prevent underage drinking come to a Laguna Beach Community Coalition meeting and get involved

Join our Parent Action Group