

# Common Sense on Alcohol in the Media

## Mixing alcohol and entertainment affects kids

Don't people have fun in alcohol ads? And they make a big impression on your kids. Alcohol ads have become entertainment in their own right. One of the most popular plot lines for teen movies is scoring alcohol for a party. There are even mobile apps centered on drinking. It's nearly impossible to undo all this influence, but you can try to balance it with honest discussions about drinking and by keeping an eye on what's influencing your kids.

### Some facts

The alcohol industry is allowed by regulators to advertise on TV shows only where 70% of the audience is over 21.

Alcohol producers spent \$991 million on television advertising in 2002 — 60% of it on sports programming (*Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, 2003*).

Online games, group pages on social media sites, and banner ads on popular sites for teens are some new ways that alcohol producers are promoting their products. The producers of Southern Comfort now pour their entire advertising budget into social media sites like Facebook (*Ad Age, 2009*).

Several studies point to the power of product placements for alcohol in TV and movies — for example, characters drinking a specific type of beer — to influence when kids start drinking as well as what and how much they drink (*Marin Institute, 2008*).

Kids whose parents restrict R-rated movies drink less alcohol and start drinking later than peers whose parents put no restrictions on movies (*Dartmouth, 2010*).

## What is alcohol advertising?

Your kids and teens get all sorts of messages about drinking and drugs from the media. And mostly what they see is that it's fun and exciting and it's what celebrities and popular people do. Not only do they see alcohol ads on TV, but also drinking and drunkenness on shows and movies targeting teens. Alcohol companies also target teens by using new media that's interactive, including social networks, viral videos, mobile cell phone updates, and downloadable apps. The viral nature of the Web allows advertisers to reach kids directly with an addictive game or funny video — and in ways that kids may not recognize as advertising.

### Why it matters

There is a direct link between role models and advertising, and the effect that both have on your kids' behavior. Alcohol companies know this, and that's why they go after your kids. The more alcohol ads young people see, the more they drink. According to one 2006 study, each additional dollar alcohol companies spend on advertising raises the number of drinks youths consume by 3 percent.

Studies have shown that the more kids drink before their brains are fully developed (in their early 20s), the more likely they are to develop lifelong alcohol dependencies. In fact, kids who start drinking before they turn 15 are four times more likely to become alcoholics than adults who begin drinking at 21. But parents can mitigate these statistics. A 2010 study by Dartmouth Medical School showed that parents who restrict R-rated movies (where alcohol is often part of the story) actually counteract the peer pressure on their kids to start drinking.

## Parent tips for elementary school kids

- » **Keep them away from alcohol ads.** Mute the ads when they come on. Especially the funny ones because the kids remember them and repeat them. One recent study showed that elementary kids could name almost all the alcohol brands showed to them but could only identify two past presidents.

## Parent tips for middle and high school kids

- » **Spell it out.** Let your kids know about marketing and that alcohol advertisers are trying to hook them on their brands — just to get more money in their pockets. Help your children decode ads' messages: What kind of lifestyle are they selling? Do these ads tell the whole story — or do they leave something out (such as DUIs, addiction, liver disease, etc.)?
- » **Moderate alcohol on TV.** You have a right to say no to programs that seem to celebrate teen drinking or show too many alcohol ads. This goes for movies, radio stations, magazines, and Web sites, too. Check out our reviews to see how a program portrays alcohol, then set your own rules.
- » **Look for teachable moments.** If you're watching a TV show, and there's a scene featuring teen drinking, or you read about a celebrity arrested for doing drugs, check in with your kids. Ask them about if their peers are using alcohol, or if they have any anxieties or questions about drinking. Take time to share your opinions — and expectations — about teens and drinking.
- » **Watch your messages.** Be a good role model by not being drunk in front of your kids or by not using alcohol to escape problems. Make sure that you don't glamorize alcohol or drugs by sharing stories about "wild days" in your past.
- » **Keep an eye on alcohol ads embedded in new media.** You don't want your kids to follow Smirnoff on Facebook or Twitter, download the latest Budweiser mobile app, or be influenced by other ways that alcohol companies are embedding their messages.