

**I'VE GOT THIS FRIEND WHO...**

# I'VE GOT THIS

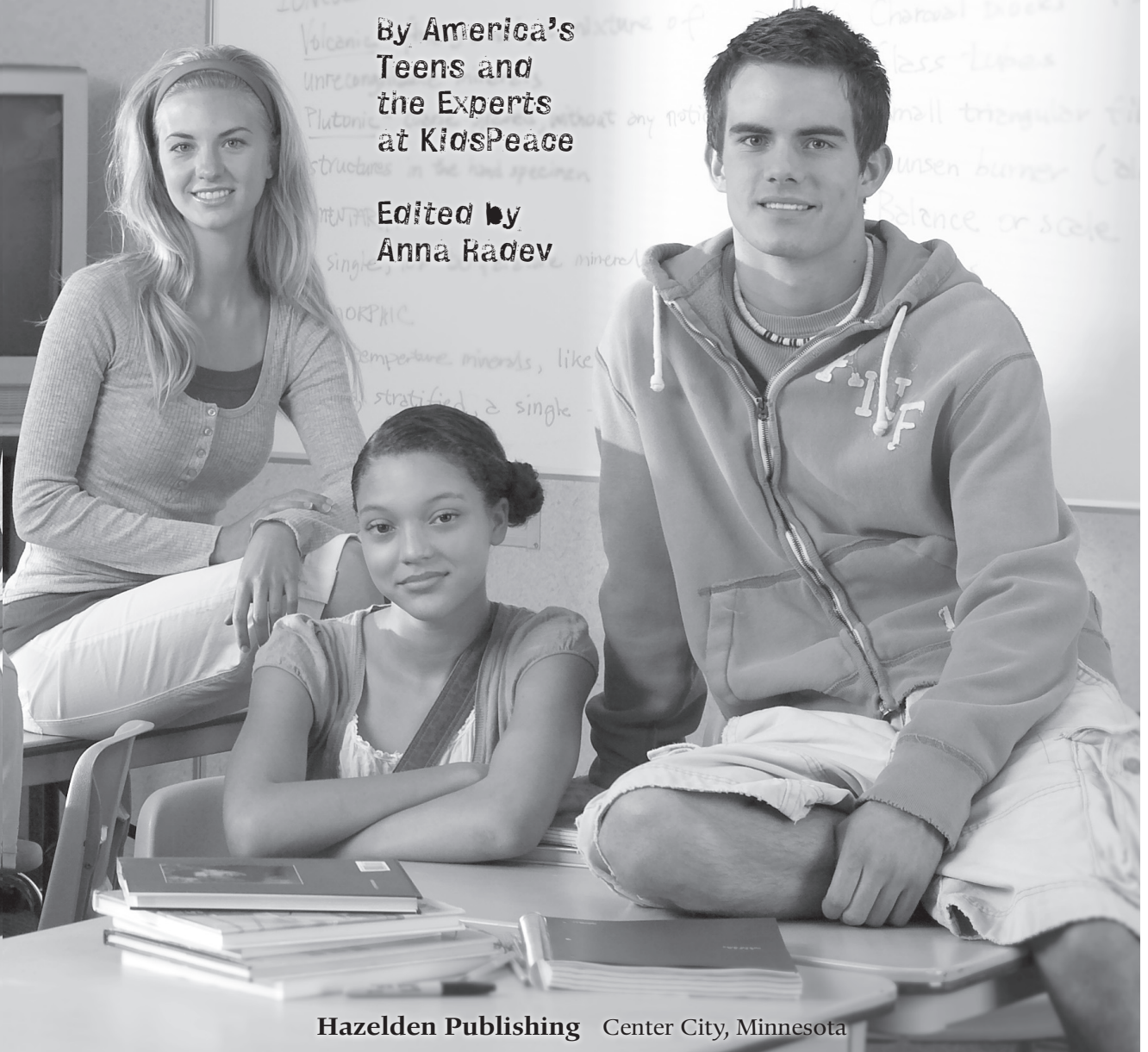
A black and white photograph of three teenagers in a classroom. A young woman stands on the left, wearing a baseball cap and a t-shirt with a graphic. A young man sits on a desk in the center, wearing a denim jacket. Another young man sits in the foreground on the right, wearing glasses and a polo shirt. The background shows classroom equipment like a microscope and a computer monitor.

Advice for Teens and  
Their Friends on Alcohol,  
Drugs, Eating Disorders,  
Risky Behavior, and More

# FRIEND WHO...

By America's  
Teens and  
the Experts  
at KidsPeace

Edited by  
Anna Radev



Hazelden Publishing Center City, Minnesota



# FOREWORD

by Chris Beckman, former cast member of MTV's *The Real World: Chicago* and author of *Clean*

**G**ROWING UP TODAY IS NO EASY TASK. Believe me, I know! Especially since the challenges of my early teens led me down a path that took more than a decade to overcome. I remember thinking my whole life had crumbled. Drinking, drugs, and other things I couldn't control all but wiped out my teens. I was finally able to pull myself together and undo some of the damage, but it took time. I got clean at twenty-three and felt like I was still thirteen emotionally. I wrote the book *Clean: A New Generation in Recovery Speaks Out* to give teens a firsthand look at what it means to face the challenges I faced and what it takes to overcome them. I hoped sharing my experiences would help other teens avoid some of my mistakes and get a better head start on becoming adults.

Childhood is a magical time. Being a kid is great because you see the best in the world, you expect only good things to happen, and you trust others without question. You see the beauty and magic in everything—you're oblivious to all the dangers and bad things the world is capable of throwing at you. That starts to change as you get older and realize the world isn't always good and kind. Sadly, you lose a little of that wide-eyed innocence and wonderment that make childhood so great. But what you gain is knowledge, wisdom, and greater control over your destiny—sometimes without even realizing it.

The teen years can be an exciting and exhilarating time of self-discovery. But they're also a terrifying time of walking down a winding road you've never walked before, not knowing where it will take you or what dangers might be just around the corner. There's a whole new set of struggles and challenges at that age, from the smallest ones, like what clothes to wear, to life-and-death situations.

While none of us can hope to make all the right choices, we can pay attention to road signs that help point us in the right direction. That's what this book, *I've Got This Friend Who...*, is all about. It offers good advice from America's teens themselves and some of the country's top experts, who work every day on the frontlines with kids who've crashed on the road of life and have the bumps and bruises to prove it. The book offers proven advice—tips and tools to help you through a problem or tough issue—lots of encouragement, and important information about where to find the best resources. Best of all, the book's written in a way

we all get—just as if we were talking to our friends. And that’s what we need when we’re having a hard time, right?

Nobody’s perfect and we all make mistakes. Some mistakes help us learn, grow, become wiser, and build character and strength. But others have no benefit at all and destroy all the good things we might have in our lives. Those mistakes—like some of the ones I made growing up—aren’t worth making, and if you can avoid them, you’ll be a lot healthier and happier.

*I’ve Got This Friend Who...* is a good handbook for older kids and teens that can help you expect, avoid, or get over the biggest bumps on the road of life and the costly mistakes they can cause. This book gets my thumbs-up. Good luck and happy travels!

# PREFACE

**T**HIS BOOK TOOK 125 YEARS and 500,000 contributors to write. It sounds like a fantastic claim, but it's true, both figuratively and literally.

*I've Got This Friend Who...* is the result of more than a century of work by the leading national children's crisis charity KidsPeace, its current 2,000 doctors and child care professionals, child and adolescent development experts from Harvard Medical School and Brown University, and—most important—more than half a million of America's teens, who are firsthand authorities on the biggest problems kids face growing up today.

Together, they have created a unique how-to manual to help teens and their friends survive the often challenging and sometimes perilous adolescent years. Written in the voice of today's young people, *I've Got This Friend Who...* was designed to help kids at exactly the critical points in their lives when they are usually least likely to turn to adults for help. Since young people's peers know just about as much as they do, this can often lead them into trouble that could have been avoided if only they—or a friend—had a little more information about how to handle things.

That's where this book comes in. The topics, information, and coping techniques featured here are based on expert knowledge and the firsthand experiences of thousands of actual teens, obtained through an innovative, problem-solving resource designed to help young people work out stresses and problems before they become overwhelming. This resource—TeenCentral.Net—was created in 1998 by Harvard Medical School's Dr. Alvin Poussaint, Brown University Child Study Center founder Dr. Lewis P. Lipsitt, and KidsPeace Executive Vice President Joseph A. Vallone, all cofounders with Lee Salk's brother, polio vaccine pioneer Jonas Salk, of the KidsPeace Lee Salk Center for Research.

Providing anonymous and free 24/7 counseling, TeenCentral.Net receives more than two million hits each month from teens with diverse backgrounds in all fifty states, military bases around the world, and one hundred foreign countries. Powered by innovative software that guides kids through a process of problem identification, information sharing, and crisis-resolution techniques, the site has become an ever-expanding database of real stories, revealing what's actually happening to our kids, what they're feeling, what the critical trends and hot-button issues are, and what they're doing about them. The chapter topics and the voices of *I've Got This Friend Who...* are based on an in-depth analysis of that database of

more than 500,000 stories. Accompanied by sensible, easy-to-use information from child care specialists, this is essentially a book *for America's teens by America's teens*.

There has perhaps never been a better time for this type of tool for teens. Today's kids face a range of pressures and dangers in the world that would have been unimaginable just a generation ago—from waves of dangerously accessible new drugs, alarmingly high rates of child abuse, and single-parent homes, to cyber-bullying, school shootings, and terrorism. But even the age-old challenges most kids have faced growing up need new solutions.

Since its founding in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1882, KidsPeace, the National Center for Kids Overcoming Crisis, has been working to develop new ideas, programs, and practical strategies to help millions of children and families avoid and overcome the kinds of crises that can strike any child. While we have directly touched the lives of thousands of children, this project aims for the first time to harness the accumulated wisdom of 125 years of hope, help, and healing in the child crisis field; cutting-edge research and theory from the KidsPeace Lee Salk Center for Research; and the cumulative experience—and, yes, savvy—of America's youth.

This book is the culmination of 125 years of experience and cumulative wisdom. KidsPeace will ensure that it makes its way into the hands of as many young people as possible, so it can be a bulwark against danger, ignorance, uncertainty, and destructive choices—and perhaps a new road map that, in a turbulent world, will help give kids peace.

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# INTRODUCTION

**E**VERY DAY YOU WALK OUT OF YOUR HOUSE, close the door behind you, and step into a world full of hope, promise, and opportunity. As a teenager, you encounter a world of endless possibilities. But you are also walking out into the unknown, and with it comes risk and uncertainty. On any given day, you may face first-time decisions, nail-biting problems, or crushing disappointments. You may struggle to do the right thing or just to get through the day and make it a few steps further in your journey of life.

Every day for 125 years, KidsPeace, the National Center for Kids Overcoming Crisis, has been keeping watch and working to bring hope, help, and healing to children, giving them tools to overcome the challenges of growing up. Over the years, KidsPeace has gathered a great deal of knowledge and expertise on children's issues, as well as unique insights on how to empower them to make each day a victory. With its sixty-five centers nationwide, more than 2,500 employees, and countless supporters, KidsPeace has directly touched the lives of 150,000 children and reached into the homes of millions more through public education and prevention.

Kids often feel they're powerless to deal with many of the problems out there, and a lot of adults reinforce that perception. But the truth is that all young people have the inner strength and ability to have a say in their lives and a choice when it comes to the trials before them. This book was written to help you find your inner courage and character and gain a sense of control over your destiny, despite problems, by making good choices and reaching out to trustworthy adults. The same goes for your friends, and you can definitely give them a helping hand along the way.

This book is based on the trials and tribulations of thousands of teens. The concerns they expressed are recounted here through discussions among six fictitious kids who come together to talk about their biggest worries. Each chapter explores a different topic. These topics were the most frequently selected issues of concern by kids who logged on to TeenCentral.Net in 2005, and they are the topics that seem to be the most interesting or troublesome to older kids and teens today. The six kids featured in this book have very different backgrounds, ages, personalities, and points of view. Imagine sitting in a room with five of your own schoolmates, who are very different from you, and talking about these various issues. Which one of these kids would you be?



## The Kids

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**Karen** Karen is sixteen. She always plays the devil's advocate. She is very smart, outspoken, independent, eccentric, and nonconformist. She likes to march to her own drum and is unconventional in her style, interests, and ideas. She is not part of the "in crowd" but has plenty of friends, and she isn't preoccupied with being popular. She is comfortable in her own skin, and she gets that just because "everyone else is doing it" doesn't mean she has to. But she is also curious about many things and life experiences—she's the kind who might try anything once to see what it's like—so she is tempted to explore the unknown. Her dilemma isn't peer pressure or the opinions of others, but rather her own curious, explorative nature. So she is the one who asks the "why" or the "why not" questions and needs to be convinced if/why something is bad by making the argument.

**Ryan** Ryan is seventeen. He is a bit of a maverick. He is on the basketball and swim teams and could be considered one of the "popular" kids, but he is also in the student government and the drama club. So although he is liked, has many friends, and does find himself in situations where other kids are doing "bad" things, he is not the quintessential "jock" who applauds and goes along for the ride. He has a levelheadedness when it comes to various issues that others his age might consider "cool." He is a voice of reason and is a good "positive peer pressure" role model, as he can use his popularity to enforce good practices and habits among his peers.

**Eric** Eric is fifteen. He is the class "nerd." He is very well schooled and informed about most subjects. Of course, he has had his share of being shunned or alienated, especially by the "popular" kids, for not being "cool," for sticking to his guns, and for not going along with the crowd. Although he covers it up fairly well, he has his angst about not fitting in, not being invited to all the parties, and not dating much. But he's made some choices about who he wants to be, and he is sticking to them. He has had plenty of free time to read and better himself, so he has read up extensively on things and knows what the consequences and repercussions of bad choices can be. He knows where he's going in life.

**Ashley** Ashley is thirteen. She has just gotten to high school and is unsure of herself. She has a good upbringing and good moral values, but she also desperately wants to fit in and be accepted. She isn't sure how to go about it—which values are worth compromising and which are not—and she feels confused and pressured. She's also a perfectionist, which is making things even harder. She has found herself in certain

situations she didn't know how to handle and is on the edge of a slippery slope. She can see and empathize with the argument for why people *do* engage in certain behaviors—she understands the appealing, enticing, “beneficial” side of these behaviors that makes them so hard to resist and easy to fall into. She needs direction to understand more clearly that although some types of behavior may be appealing at certain times, they come at a very high price.

**Emile** Emile is eighteen. He comes from a troubled family background and a tough neighborhood. In his teens, Emile went through a rebellious period that lasted several years when he engaged in nearly every conceivable “bad” behavior out there. In the last year, he decided to straighten out and sought help. Now he describes himself as a survivor who's on the right track, although his earlier actions have left scars and challenges that he struggles with every day. He's a senior, finishing his high-school education and planning ahead. As someone who has “been through the fire and back,” he is an eye-opener for the others. He reveals to them the truth behind many of the myths they may have heard, sharing his real-world experiences and those of people he knew in his old neighborhood. He provides perspective and a reality check that bring things into focus when issues and arguments seem fuzzy.

**Jessica** Jessica is seventeen. She is very popular, a cheerleader, and she likes to have a good time. She thinks she is young and free and should enjoy herself as much as she can. She goes along with whatever her “crew” has in mind to have a good time. She doesn't think she is doing anything to the extent that it will become a problem. She is a “recreational abuser” of various types of rebellious teen behaviors and is in denial that these things will build up to anything serious. She doesn't quite see what's so bad about experimenting with certain things in moderation every now and then. She thinks she is in control of it all and knows exactly what she is doing.

Regardless of which kid you identify with most, we hope this book will help you make informed, smart decisions that will keep you safe, healthy, and happy—and also allow you to help a friend in need. A safe journey through life is what we all want for ourselves and our friends, and it shouldn't be left to chance.

One difficult choice kids and teens struggle with every day is whether or not to drink alcohol. Alcohol is a constant temptation, and the pressure is great. Drinking has always carried an image of being “cool.” Television and magazine ads bombard kids with images that tell them alcohol makes them seem more mature, fashionable, desirable, and fun. Also, the growing prevalence of much more serious, dangerous, and deadly drugs on the market makes alcohol look mild and almost harmless in comparison.

—Janet Sterba, L.P.C.

But the problems that come with drinking are still very real and sometimes deadly. Alcohol can disrupt kids’ physical and emotional health, and it can interfere with their ability to get by in the world. At best, it takes away a person’s ability to make good judgments. When you are not in control of yourself and your actions, it can lead to a whole range of other bad choices and bigger problems. In the worst-case scenario, it can cost kids their lives. It happens all too often.

—Nirmala Yarra Karna, M.D.



Ryan

# 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

# TOASTING THE TOWN

Lifting Your Spirits with Alcohol  
Can Lead to Head-On Collisions  
That Can Shatter Your Life



Jessica

Eric

Karen

Emile

Ashley

## Alcohol *So What about It?*

### Alcohol

a colorless, unstable, flammable liquid made by fermenting sugars and starches

**Karen** Drinking alcohol—what’s the big deal? Some kids drink once in a while, some do nothing but party, and other kids never touch the stuff. It’s a matter of personal choice, and we all have to make the decision for ourselves. Sounds easy enough—a clear choice between drinking or not drinking—right? Well, in reality, it isn’t that simple or clear. Alcohol has its appeal—I mean, it makes you feel and act differently for sure, and sometimes that’s exactly what you want. Then, there’s also a lot of pressure at our age—to make friends, be accepted and belong, be liked, and fit in. Peer pressure is a major part of being a kid, and the right answer isn’t always clear. On top of that, people we idolize and look up to often glamorize alcohol and encourage us to “get with it.” So where do we start?

**Eric** Well, I think we start by talking about what drinking alcohol is all about. Basically, *alcohol* is a colorless, unstable, flammable liquid that is

Types of Drinking	
Abstaining	Not drinking at all, or one or two drinks a year
Infrequent drinking	One drink or less a month
Light drinking	Two to four drinks once a month, or one drink three to four times a month
Moderate drinking	One drink once a week, or two to six drinks three to four times a month, or five or more drinks once a month
Moderately heavy drinking	Two to four drinks once a week, or more drinks three to four times a month
Heavy drinking	Five or more drinks at least once a week

made by fermenting sugars and starches. A lot of beverages contain alcohol, and many people drink it. There are several types of drinking (*see above*).

**Ashley** What about *social drinking*? People use that term a lot.

**Social drinking** \_\_\_\_\_  
having one or two  
drinks when out with  
friends

**Eric** Well, when adults say “social drinking,” it generally means having a drink or two now and then when you are out with friends. Usually social drinkers are light drinkers. But with people our age, drinking is different and often gets out of control when it’s part of hanging out. A lot of kids end up drinking a lot when they’re around other people who drink. So, if you are often around kids who drink a lot, you might become a heavy social drinker and not even know how it happened.

**Ryan** Yeah, I agree with Eric. I mean, if you think about it, most adults don’t spend even half as much time as kids do hanging out and socializing with friends. They’re too busy with work, kids, groceries, laundry, and other stuff. But hanging out is one of the main things we kids do—sometimes every day and all day. Also, I don’t think drinking is as seductive for adults, because they’re allowed to do it. But it’s like the forbidden apple to us, since we’re not allowed to drink before we are twenty-one.

**Ashley** I’ve heard “binge drinking” a lot too. That’s, like, when you chug a whole bunch of alcohol really quickly, right? Like, what people do at keg parties in college? My sister’s in a sorority...

**Binging** \_\_\_\_\_  
drinking five or more  
drinks one after the  
other in a very short  
time

**Emile** Yeah, *binging* is when you drink five or more drinks one after the other in a very short time. People do it through games like funneling, chugging, or “keg stand” at parties.



### **Blood alcohol concentration**

the level of alcohol in your blood after you've been drinking

**Eric** And what happens is, when you drink that much that fast, the alcohol in your blood jumps up to a high level very quickly. That level is your *blood alcohol concentration (BAC)* or *blood alcohol level (BAL)*. Just to be clear, a regular drink is one twelve-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one five-ounce glass of wine, or a shot (1.5 ounces) of hard liquor, like whiskey. How much alcohol it takes and how quickly you have to drink it to get tipsy or drunk depends on how tall you are, how much you weigh, what shape you're in, if you ate while drinking, how much sleep you've had, if you're taking medication, your body chemistry and your tolerance to alcohol, your mood, and your age.

**Ashley** Wow, I didn't know some of that. So, like, the bigger and heavier you are, the more alcohol it takes to make you drunk? And being tired or having an empty stomach makes it, like, easier to feel drunk too?

**Eric** Yeah. Say you weigh 200 pounds. It would take two times more alcohol to get to the same BAL than if you weighed 100 pounds. That's why some people feel drunk after a glass of wine and others can have three beers and not be drunk. The legal BAL for driving after drinking in the United States is 0.08 percent, by the way, which basically means up to two drinks. But that also depends on your weight, tolerance, and the other stuff.

**Ashley** So, what about, like, medication—what does that have to do with anything?

### **Depressant**

a substance that slows your movements and reactions, makes you tired, and may cause you to feel sad or depressed

**Ryan** Basically, alcohol is a drug and a *depressant*, Ash. What that means is, at first, it gives you a high. But after a while, it starts to slow you down, slows your movements and reactions, makes you tired and sleepy, and even sad or depressed. Well, some medications do the same thing—even some over-the-counter stuff. So you have to be very careful about mixing them with alcohol, because they will have a double impact and will make your blood pressure drop way low. You could die. And other meds just have bad effects when you combine them with alcohol—they can make you feel weird, sick, or dizzy.

### **Alcoholism**

a disorder in which a person drinks a lot and is physically and/or mentally dependent on alcohol

**Emile** All right, something else we should talk about is alcoholism. Alcohol, just like drugs, is *addictive*, meaning you can get hooked on it. *Alcoholism* is a disorder where a person drinks a lot and is dependent on alcohol—physically, mentally, or both. That means your body or your mind or both crave it really often. And it affects how you get by in the world—socially, at work, at home, everywhere. It's also called *alcohol abuse* and *alcohol dependence*.

**Eric** Now here are some facts about alcohol and kids ages twelve to seventeen: 7.2 million drank at least once in the past year; 2.7 million

drank once a month or more in the past year; 1 million drank at least once a week in the last year; girls are as likely as boys their age to drink; Hispanics were as likely as white non-Hispanics to be drinkers; and African American kids were least likely to be current drinkers.<sup>1</sup>

Also, girls are binge drinking more, while boys are binge drinking less than they used to. The punch line: Every day, 5,400 young people under sixteen take their first drink of alcohol.<sup>2</sup> And there's more stuff that will blow your mind.

**Karen** Here's what I found. Eighty to 90 percent of middle school kids don't drink. But the numbers go up sharply for eighth- to twelfth-graders.

**Emile** Yeah, and binge drinking is very common for kids who drink because it's hard to just have one when everyone else keeps going, and the momentum is building in your group.

## Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall...

### *Why Booze?*

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**Eric** So, a lot of kids drink, but plenty of kids don't.

**Jessica** Yeah, who's that, Eric? Kids like you, who stay home buried in books all the time?

#### Statistics Speak for Themselves

- More than 50 percent of all students in grades six to twelve in 2004 had tried alcohol, including beer, wine coolers, or hard liquor.<sup>3</sup>
- Of the young people who drink, almost 7.2 million (19 percent) are binge drinkers and 2.3 million (6 percent) are heavy drinkers.<sup>4</sup> Kids usually have their first drink around age twelve.<sup>5</sup>
- The average age at which kids begin drinking regularly is 15.9 years old.<sup>6</sup>
- Sixty-five percent of kids who drink get alcohol from friends or family.
- Children who begin drinking before age fifteen are four times more likely to become alcoholics as adults than kids who begin drinking at twenty-one, the legal drinking age.<sup>7</sup>
- Alcohol-related fatality rates are almost two times greater for eighteen-, nineteen-, and twenty-year-olds as for people over twenty-one. More than 40 percent of crash fatalities among eighteen-, nineteen-, and twenty-year-olds are alcohol related.<sup>8</sup>
- Teenagers make up less than 7 percent of the nation's licensed drivers, but they are involved in 15 percent of all fatal crashes.<sup>9</sup>

### Alcohol Drinking among Eighth-Graders through Twelfth-Graders

Action	Eighth-Graders	Tenth-Graders	Twelfth-Graders
Drank in the past month	25%	40%	53%
Got drunk	8%	22%	34%
Binged in the past two weeks	15%	25%	30%
Drank every day	1%	2%	4%

2004 statistics<sup>10</sup>

**Karen** Okay, so why *do* kids drink?

**Jessica** Well, because it seems like everybody drinks. I mean, I don't know anyone who doesn't—my parents, all my relatives, my friends. Every time I go to, like, a get-together, or out to dinner with family friends, or to a friend's house, or just sit around with some of my older cousins, they all drink. Even, like, the minister at church drinks, and of course, there's wine for communion. Alcohol is common in many homes. And let's face it—parties, picnics, wedding receptions, whatever—if adults, like, get together to have a good time, alcohol is always in the mix. Adults tell us not to drink, but their example says the opposite.

Let's be fair—drinking is legal, so it's not like drugs where you're breaking the law. The bottom line: I've been around alcohol all my life, so what I know is, it can't be, like, all that bad, right?

**Ryan** Wrong. Let's set the record straight: Just because adults drink doesn't mean it's okay for you to. Drinking before you're twenty-one—that *is* illegal, and you *are* breaking the law. Actually, Jess, not everyone drinks, and neither do all adults. It really depends on what company you keep. In some homes, it is done, in others, not so much. About 36 percent of adults don't drink at all. I happen to know a lot of people like that—like my parents and many of my relatives, some of my neighbors, and even Coach Shepard. Surprised?

**Eric** As far as parents and other adults we admire go—yeah, we do look up to them, hoping to find answers to a lot of stuff. When our parents drink, and especially if they drink a lot, we think since they do it, why not me? And we end up “doing as they do, not as they say.” But you also have to think about it, you guys—adults are people too, and they can make mistakes just like kids do.

**Karen** Yeah, my Uncle Mike was like that. I loved him, but he wasn't someone I'd want to be like when I grow up.

## Why Do Kids Drink?

- Out of curiosity—experimentation to discover what it feels like and what effect it has
- Peer pressure to fit in and be accepted by other kids who drink
- To appear cool, mature, grown up, adventurous, fun, and knowledgeable about adult behavior
- To forget about or escape from everyday problems or a life crisis
- To rebel against adults or imposed norms and to assert independence
- To feel better, happier, and livelier
- To ease nervousness and become more outgoing and likable
- To medicate emotional problems or symptoms like depression, anxiety, fears, or stress
- Because they believe everybody drinks and drinking is a normal part of life and socializing
- Because alcohol is easily available to them in their homes or other places
- Because people they look up to—parents, siblings, relatives, authority figures, celebrities—drink and set that example for them, or tolerate or encourage the behavior
- For the thrill of it

**Emile** Jess, when I listen to you, I can totally hear myself a few years back. I thought the more I drank, the more cool and fun I became, and the more people liked me. People think it makes other people look up to them, because they seem grown up and mature. Or you drink to show you'll do what you want—make your own rules and stick it to the people who are telling you what to do. And sometimes, you just want to cut loose or feel better. When you have enough drinks, everything stops mattering, and it's all good. It helps make bad things go away, and that's why so many people I know drank and still do. That's why I drank. And take it from me—it was a bad idea. Liquor's a false god.

**Jessica** Well, I mean, yeah, drinking a lot all the time is probably a bad idea, just like overdoing anything is usually bad for you. My dad always says moderation is the key. That's what I'm saying. Having, like, one or two drinks—I just don't see how that's so horrible.

**Eric** Okay, well, even assuming you can keep your drinking from getting out of hand, that's not the only issue. How about drunk driving and the accidents that happen all the time when kids *DUI—drive under the influence*—or get in cars with people who do? You don't have to be an alcoholic

**Jessica** Okay, I'm pretty sure all of us here have had a drink before, except maybe Eric. I admit, I drink when I'm out with my friends, and you all know, it really does, like, make a difference in your mood and how you feel—how much fun you have. Alcohol helps you relax, loosen up, and be more talkative, bubbly, funny, and spontaneous, and, yeah, silly too, which is, like, the whole point. Besides, how stupid would it be if I'm chilling with my friends and alcohol gets passed around and I am like, "Ehhh, no, thank you!"

**Ashley** Yeah, I mean it's hard when pretty much everyone who's anyone drinks. If people like that do notice you and invite you somewhere, you pretty much have to be cool and, like, go along to get along. If they end up thinking you are boring and stupid and immature, they definitely won't invite you again, and you'll go back to being a nobody just like that.

**Ryan** So, let me get this. You're saying drinking solely for the sake of other people's opinion of you and to make them like you so you can be popular is worth it? Nice way to be an adult, Ash. News flash: Drinking doesn't make you mature. Standing up for yourself and being your own person does. People can lead you down many bad paths if you don't learn to think for yourself.

**Ashley** But it's really tough when you're trying to fit in and make a good impression on a bunch of kids who are, like, way older and cooler. If alcohol calms your nerves and helps you loosen up, it can make a big difference.

**Ryan** Ash, we get it. But if it really is that important to you, there are other ways to deal with nervousness. Alcohol is not the only choice or the best one. You can go with someone else to give each other strength, you can ease into talking with other people, you can even do some breathing techniques to help you relax.

**Jessica** Okay, well, that's all good—I can, like, somehow avoid drinking in high school without my social life becoming a complete disaster. But then comes college. You have to learn sometime, because how do you avoid drinking in college?

**Karen** We're talking about alcohol here, not badminton. No college awards a degree in drunkenness or lewd behavior, and I'm pretty sure that's unlikely to change. Yes, a lot of college students do drink, but from what I hear, many of those situations don't end too well.



or a binge-drinker—it only takes a couple of drinks and one time of drunk driving to get into some real trouble.

**Jessica** Again, the word *drunk*. I am not saying drive drunk. Absolutely not, of course! But there's, like, a difference between having a couple of drinks and being drunk. When I have a drink or two, I don't feel drunk, and it doesn't affect my ability to drive. If anything, it makes me even more careful—I pay, like, even closer attention to other drivers. If I do feel like the alcohol is getting to me, I have a coffee or two to clear my head and wait it out. If I actually feel *drunk*, then I just don't get behind the wheel. On top of that, I don't know anyone who's had some drinks and then gotten into an accident.

**Ryan** Ahhh, yes, the “it's not going to happen to me” attitude! I know it well.

### Myths about Alcohol

- Alcohol is legal, so it's not that big a deal to drink.
- Popular kids, good athletes, and even good students drink, so it's okay for me to drink.
- Saying “no” will make me look immature, uncool, and unadventurous. Everybody will think I'm a loser or dork, and no one will want to hang out with me.
- Everybody in college drinks, so if I don't learn to drink, I will be left out.
- My parents and all the other adults I know drink and keep alcohol in the house, so they must be okay with me drinking.
- If my favorite celebrities drink, why shouldn't I?
- The more I drink, the happier, more outgoing, and fun I become and the more people like me.
- Binge drinking is no big deal—I'm just having a little fun. Nothing bad will happen.
- I am not an alcoholic unless I drink a lot every single day.
- I drink because I want to, not because I need to. I can stop anytime.
- Even if I've had some drinks, if I don't feel drunk, I am okay to drive.
- I drive better when I've been drinking because I am more cautious and vigilant.
- It's okay to get into a car with someone who's been drinking if they don't look drunk.
- If I've been drinking and have to drive, a strong cup of coffee will sober me up.
- I know what I am doing, and I am completely in control even when I've had several drinks, so nobody can take advantage of me.
- An accident won't happen to me.

**Karen** Everything we're saying here makes sense, but I get why it's so hard to choose. I mean, it might seem obvious what the right choice is, but then we get mixed messages not only from our friends and families but also from society. I mean, every day we are bombarded by images on TV, in movies, on billboards, in magazines, and in video clips that make alcohol look so cool and natural. Alcohol was shown in more than 90 percent of the 200 most popular movie rentals for 1996 and 1997 and in 17 percent of the 1,000 most popular songs, including almost half of all the rap music recording.<sup>11</sup> How do you say "no"?

**Eric** Well, for one thing, we can all learn to think for ourselves. You can't agree with everything out there without question. The advertising, it's there for a reason—to sell a product. So, those people are looking out for what they want, and it's about making money. But what the media doesn't show is the dark side of drinking—all the bad stuff. An important part of growing up is learning to make choices for yourself and figuring out the right ones. Underage drinking isn't one of them.

## Take One Down, Pass It Around...

### *Who's at Risk for Drinking?*

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**Karen** Anyone can get tempted into alcohol. The younger you are, the more impressionable you are. You look up to older people to be an example for you.

**Ryan** What adds to the problem is how easy it is to get booze nowadays. Plenty of grown-ups are willing to buy alcohol for underage kids because they think it's a rite of passage or no big thing. Some parents even have drinking parties to keep their kids from drinking and driving, or to "teach kids how to drink the right way."

**Emile** That's pretty messed up, because kids who start drinking before age fifteen are four times more likely to become alcoholics than kids who don't.

## A Losing Game of Spin the Bottle

### *The Consequences of Drinking*

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**Karen** Wanting to forget your problems or to be accepted by others is totally normal. Everyone feels that need during their life, especially teens. We all want to be liked—nobody wants to be alone. And we all have things in our lives we want to forget.

Choosing not to drink can mean missing out on a lot—the experience itself, fitting in, the group closeness, being seen as cool or grown up. And there isn't a huge neon warning sign with flashing lights right in front

### Putting the Brakes on DUI: Different Ways to Refuse a Ride with a Friend Who's Been Drinking

"Thanks, guys, but my sister is coming to pick me up, so I'll just wait for her. Hey, she could drop you guys off too. She's way cool—she's a college girl and has the most awesome car!"

"I'm waiting for my friend, who is in the bathroom."

"I'm not ready to leave, guys. I'm having a blast."

"Actually, I think my friend and I will walk. I live only a couple of blocks away, so I'm cool."

after drinking. If you're drinking, find a friend who's dry to drop you off at home. Or call someone you can trust and ask him to come get you. Or ask to spend the night and go home the next day. Don't get into a car with anyone who has been drinking, no matter how sober that person might act or look to you. Don't expect someone under the influence to get you home safe and sound—that's not something you want to leave to chance.

**Eric** If someone else has hit the bottle and is heading for the car, try to talk her out of it or just take her keys. If a bunch of kids are drunk and pushing you to "not be such a wuss and go for a ride," don't fall for it.

**Ryan** You can be "cool" without risking your life. I've gone over things a thousand times in my head—all the things my brother could have said instead of getting into that car that night. If he had, I'd still have my big brother.

**Karen** Yeah, also, if you know this kind of thing goes on regularly at certain houses and kids are driving after drinking, just don't go. If you know the kids' parents have no idea, it might be good to tell an adult who can take the next step—talk to the other parents, to the school, or whatever.

**Jessica** Yeah, right! And have the whole school think I am a total loser that rats on other kids. It's hard enough to fit in without having, like, a reputation as a snob or a prude. Instant social suicide!

**Karen** No—think about this. If your parents or adults at school handle it with tact, chances are no one will ever know who told, and you get to have a clear conscience about doing the right thing. Imagine how bad

you would feel if something did happen to one of those kids—the guilt of knowing you could have said something and didn’t.

## Finding a Lifeline

### *Getting Help for Yourself or Your Friend*

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**Emile** Well, the good news is, if you, a friend, or someone else you care about is having a problem with alcohol, help is available. More than a million Americans have gotten help and are living healthy lives, free of alcohol. I am one of them. Proud to say today I’ve been sober for seven months and eleven days. So, it’s important to get help.

**Jessica** How? What do you do? I think my boyfriend might need to talk to somebody.

**Emile** It’s good that you’re thinking about it.

Learning more about drinking and its problems is the first step in getting help. The second is admitting to yourself and others that there is a problem. The third step is realizing you cannot fix it by yourself and that you need help.

There are several places you can turn. One is your parents. But a lot of kids don’t want to talk to their parents—they’re scared of how they will react or afraid to be a disappointment. You can also go to a school guidance counselor, teacher, family friend, family doctor, minister at church, or anyone you know cares.

**Ryan** The next thing is to distance yourself from people who drink and avoid places where there’s alcohol. The last thing you need is more temptation. This is especially true after you get help and stop drinking, in order to stay off booze and avoid starting up again.

## Where to Get Help



**Emile** You can find an anonymous hotline for a local drug and alcohol program or call your local Alcoholics Anonymous organization. Just look it up in the Yellow Pages.



**Eric** There’s also a great Web site, TeenCentral.Net, just for older kids and teens, where you can write in your issues, have other kids your age give you feedback, and have adult counselors respond to your problem

## **A Message to Teenagers from the Alcoholics Anonymous Web Site: How to Tell When Drinking Is Becoming a Problem**

Think you might have a problem with your drinking? To help you decide, answer the twelve questions on the Alcoholics Anonymous Web site. The answers are nobody's business but yours. If you answer "yes" to any one of these questions, it may be time to take a serious look at what drinking might be doing to you. If you do need help or if you'd just like to talk to someone, call an Alcoholics Anonymous center in your area.

with helpful advice. The Web site was created by the 125-year-old children's charity KidsPeace. You can imagine these guys know a thing or two about kids and problems. Give it a shot.

**Emile** There are also hundreds of other sites on the Internet you can check out.



### **Web Sites**

#### **Alcoholics Anonymous**

**[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)**

This Web site of the international alcohol recovery support organization provides valuable information about quitting, including locations where support meetings take place, to help you in your recovery if alcohol has the better of you.

#### **Hazelden Foundation**

**[www.hazelden.org](http://www.hazelden.org)**

The Web site of the alcohol and drug treatment organization Hazelden includes valuable information on drinking, alcohol abuse, and the road to recovery, which you can share with your friends and peers.

#### **KidsPeace**

**[www.KidsPeace.org](http://www.KidsPeace.org)**

The Web site of the 125-year-old children's charity contains information about problems and issues you might be facing that could drive you to drink.

#### **TeenCentral.Net**

**[www.TeenCentral.Net](http://www.TeenCentral.Net)**

This Web site is especially designed for teens and offers anonymous, free, clinically screened advice to help you deal with the problems you face every day, so you can avoid turning to alcohol for comfort.



**National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)**  
**[www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)**

This Web site includes a section to educate you and your friends on the science behind drug use and abuse.

**Phoenix House**  
**[www.drughelp.org](http://www.drughelp.org)**

The Web site of this alcohol and drug treatment and recovery facility provides information on alcoholism and how you can get help for a drinking problem.

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**  
**[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)**

This Web site has a ton of statistics about the abuse of alcohol and information on places where you can get help.

**National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence (NCADD)**  
**[www.ncadd.org](http://www.ncadd.org)**

This Web site contains useful information about substance abuse and the terrible consequences.



## Additional Resources

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### Web Sites and Articles

**TeensHealth, “Drugs and Alcohol”**  
[www.kidshealth.org/teen/drug\\_alcohol](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/drug_alcohol)

**Talking with Kids about Tough Issues,  
“Talking with Kids About Alcohol and Drugs”**  
[www.talkingwithkids.org/alcohol.html](http://www.talkingwithkids.org/alcohol.html)

**Neuroscience for Kids, “Alcohol and the Brain”**  
**by Eric H. Chudler, Ph.D.**  
<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/alco.html>

**PBS Kids GO!, It’s My Life, “Alcohol: The Basics”**  
<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/body/alcohol/article2.html>

**Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)**  
[www.sadd.org](http://www.sadd.org)



## Books

*Teens Under the Influence: The Truth about Kids, Alcohol, and Other Drugs—How to Recognize the Problem and What to Do About It*  
by Katherine Ketcham and Nicholas A. Pace, M.D.

*Alcohol 101: An Overview for Teens* by Margaret O. Hyde and John F. Setaro, M.D.

*When Someone You Love Abuses Alcohol or Drugs: A Guide for Kids*  
by James J. Crist, Ph.D.

*What to Do When You're Sad & Lonely: A Guide for Kids* by James J. Crist, Ph.D.,  
Eric Braun, Catherine Broberg, and Michael Chesworth

*Alcoholics Anonymous* (4th edition) by Alcoholics Anonymous  
World Services