

Prevention ^{IN} Action

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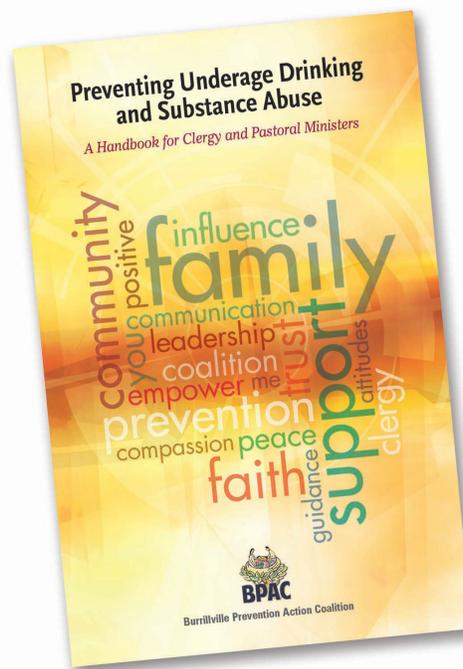
Faith Communities Play a Powerful Role in Preventing Underage Substance Use

Prevention research clearly shows that youth who participate in a religious community are less likely to use alcohol and other drugs. In fact, young congregants are about 50 percent less likely to use alcohol, tobacco and marijuana compared to teens who are not actively involved in a faith community!

The Protective Factor. Like any public health program, prevention science assesses risk and protective factors. A risk factor is anything that will increase the chance that a teen will use drugs. For example, we know that being bullied, hanging out with drug-using friends and lack of parental monitoring all increase the likelihood that a teen will use drugs. Protective factors reduce the risk of teen substance use. For example, community service, providing wholesome youth activities, and parents who talk frequently with their children about the harms of drug use all work to “protect” kids, that is, to reduce the risk of substance use when kids are out there on their own. Active involvement in a faith community is, in itself, a proven protective factor because faith communities instill strong values that serve to prevent many high-risk behaviors.

A new resource for faith leaders. The Coalition will soon publish “*Preventing Underage Drinking and Substance*

When it comes to preventing underage substance use, faith communities are natural partners.



Abuse — A Handbook for Clergy and Pastoral Ministers” that provides tips on how faith leaders can elevate drug abuse prevention on their agendas, put drug prevention messages in the context of religious beliefs, help young people become more media literate and extend the reach of faith-based drug prevention initiatives. Some of the tips included in the booklet are:

- Educate your congregation about the impact of alcohol and drugs on children, families and the community.
- Use sermons, study groups and counseling sessions to help congregants recognize that alcoholism and drug dependence are treatable diseases.
- Acknowledge that the prevention of alcohol and drug problems is a major concern of your congregation/faith community.
- Have a Prevention Bulletin Board to post local news clippings and other resources.
- Include in your youth education curriculum the effects of alcohol and drugs with an emphasis on their impact on the developing brain.
- Publish information about how to access treatment, recovery and prevention services, including AA, Al-Anon and Alateen, in your news letters and weekly bulletins.
- Organize opportunities for parents to increase their awareness and understanding of underage drinking.

Importantly, consider becoming an active member of the Burrillville Prevention Action Coalition. When it comes to preventing underage substance use, faith communities are natural partners.



Next Issue: The Role of Schools in Substance Use Prevention

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