

Kids and drinking:

How some parents cope

Home breathalyzers can help, but experts urge caution

BY CHRISTY L. BREITHAUPT
Special to The Detroit News

Rick Chiarello loves his children. He knows they are smart, well-adjusted and able to make good decisions. However, he also knows peer pressure can cause even the strongest child to stray.

That's why Chiarello of St. Joseph bought an AlcoHawk to determine if his children were using alcohol.

"I figured it would be really good because they were both in high school," Chiarello says of his teens. "A lot of their friends drank a lot, and I wanted to make sure they didn't."

With home breathalyzers readily available in recent years, more parents are turning to the devices to help monitor their children's behavior. But breathalyzers often aren't necessary, says Blake Angove, an adolescent substance abuse therapist with Henry Ford Health System.

"We would recommend a breathalyzer when the trust has already been broken," he says. "When the child has broken the rules or has lied about their involvement with alcohol. ... If the person has an established problem with alcohol abuse, it can be an effective tool. It can help them to say 'no.'"

If there's good, open communication, using a breathalyzer is an overreaction that could be harmful, Angove says. "It can have a negative effect on a good, trusting relationship," he explains.

Chiarello, though, says that hasn't been the case for his family. He still feels good about choosing to use the breathalyzer after his teens have been driving and occasionally out of the blue when they don't expect it.

"It helps keep them out of trouble," he says.

Christy L. Breithaupt is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.



AlcoHawk (Model ABI) Digital Breathalyzer runs about \$100.



It's a wakeup call for some parents that even the best kids can bow to peer pressure and get in trouble drinking alcohol.

How to talk to children about substance abuse

Here are some tips:

- Know the law. Impress upon your child the legal consequences of underage drinking. Also know the legal repercussions of giving alcohol to underage children or letting them drink in your home.
- Build your child's self-esteem. Having confidence will help them defend themselves against peer pressure.
- Keep alcohol out of the reach of your children.
- Listen to your children. Talk openly and honestly with them about alcohol abuse and address any concerns or questions they might have with factual information.
- Be a good example. Don't abuse alcohol in front of your children. If you have a substance abuse problem, the best thing you can do for your children is get help.
- Know your child's friends. Find out about your children's acquaintances and talk with their parents as well. This will help you to form an information network with other par-

ents.

- If your child is going to a party, make sure there will be parental supervision. Call the parent and make sure they will not allow alcohol at the party.
- Tell your child to call you if he or she is drunk or if their ride has been drinking. Call the parents of any other children involved.
- Know your genetic history. If your family members are genetically predisposed to alcoholism you may need to keep a closer watch on your child.
- Be especially cautious around the holidays, prom, homecoming, graduation and on the weekends, as these are high-risk times for children and drinking.
- All children can start drinking, no matter how wonderful they are. Don't assume because your child gets good grades and never breaks curfew that they will not drink.
- Use your pediatrician or local police as sources of information

before talking with your children.

- Look for the signs. Children that are struggling with alcohol may become withdrawn, lose interest in schoolwork, change friends, and become defiant or moody. If your child is displaying these signs, then schedule an appointment with a doctor for an evaluation.
- Your child may ask you if you drank at their age. Be honest when you answer but also highlight the consequences of your actions.
- Choose things that are important to your children to motivate them not to drink. If your children play sports, explain they could get kicked off the team if they drink. If they are academically motivated, tell them they could lose their scholarship.

Teens tell where they get alcohol

Teenagers have little difficulty obtaining alcohol, finds a survey sponsored by the American Medical Association, with adults often complicit in the process. The survey of 701 U.S. teens, ages 13 to 18, was conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited in April and is accurate within 4 percentage points.

Percentage of teenagers saying it was easy to get alcohol through the following sources:

- At a party: 80 percent
- From their home (without their parents' knowledge): 67 percent
- From relatives or a brother / sister who is older than 21: 65 percent
- From someone else's parent(s): 40 percent
- Using a fake ID: 36 percent
- From their parents (with their parents' knowledge): 32 percent



Source: American Medical Association

— Los Angeles Times

Sources: Blake Angove, Henry Ford Health Care System adolescent substance abuse therapist; the American Academy of Pediatrics; and the Michigan Resource Center.