

# A is for Alcohol...

Although we don't often refer to it as one, alcohol is a drug. *Period.* And, "it is everywhere", one teen is quoted as saying in a follow-up focus group to the 2008 McCreary Adolescent Health Survey.

Agreed, it can be difficult to see alcohol in the same way we view other "drugs". Even though our social and cultural "eyes" do not see alcohol as a drug, the brain, and the body makes no such distinction. And so, we sell this particular "drug" in stores and not on street corners or alleyways; and often I hear parents sigh with relief that their kids are "only drinking". In reality, the normalcy surrounding alcohol is part of what makes it one of the most dangerous drugs out there. Alcohol often glamorized and sensationalized in every form possible in our media. Could you imagine a bus ad for marijuana?



Despite regulations to protect youth from alcohol advertising children and teenagers below drinking age are regularly exposed to high levels of alcohol advertising. For example, one of every six magazine advertisements and one of every fourteen television advertisements for alcohol, target underage drinkers.

## *Seven Myths Alcohol Advertisers want Youth to Believe:*

1. Everyone drinks alcohol
2. Drinking has no risks
3. Drinking helps to solve problems
4. Alcohol is a magic potion that can transform you
5. Sport and alcohol go together
6. If alcohol were truly dangerous, we wouldn't be advertising it
7. Alcohol companies promote drinking only in moderation

*Source: Strasburger, 2002 (adapted from Kilbourne- Media and values)*

In 2002, underage youth were exposed to 65% more cooler advertisements, 45% more beer advertisements, and 12% more spirits advertisements than adults 21 years and over.



Alcohol is deeply rooted in Canadian culture; and for many young people, the current cultural attitudes support much unhealthy behaviour related to its use. In BC alone, alcohol consumption per person has increased over the past decade from 7.6 litres of alcohol to 8.6 litres in 2009. Essentially this translates into every British Columbian 15 years or older, consuming 506 drinks a year.



**A is for Adults:** As parents, we are still the most influential forces in the lives of our children. Regardless of whether our child is 5 or 15, they learn from what they see. Youth who have strong associations with low or non-drinking friends and family members have been shown to be up to 50% less likely to drink early, often or in risky ways than peers who had family or friends who drank heavily and frequently.



**A is for Accountability:** A major shift is required. Delaying initiation to alcohol experimentation is about more than not breaking the law. People who begin drinking alcohol before the age of 15 are six times more likely than those who start at age 21 and older to develop alcohol problems. Parents and other adults need to be aware that providing alcohol to minors can expose them to a greater risk for problematic use of alcohol and set them on a path with increased potential for problems with alcohol and other drugs in the future.



This year Vancouver Coastal Health and several community partners will be launching an Anti-bootlegging Campaign to bring awareness to the often unseen consequences that can follow when adults provide alcohol to minors. If alcohol advertising is everywhere, that's where we will be as well. Posters warning of the potential risks and harms related to underage drinking will be posted around the North Shore community; in private liquor stores, libraries, community center's and even local coffee shops.



**A is for Awareness and Action:** Read the "Seven Myths Alcohol Advertisers Want Youth To Believe". Cut it

out, put it on your Fridge; talk about it with your kids. Teach your kids to be critical thinkers, to consider moderation and to use common sense.

And finally, **A is for Adolescents:** These are your children, my children, the neighbour's children. They are bright, they are beautiful, and they are on their way. Let's make sure they get there.



*Written by Kerrie Watt, Prevention Consultant for West Vancouver District, West Vancouver School Board, VCH*

**If you have any questions or suggestions for future topics, please call the On-Call Nurse for the Child & Youth Team at 604-983-6714.**