



Youth Assessment and Brief Interventions

Neuroscience has firmly established that young people are hard-wired for risk-taking in their early teens, making their reckless behavior troubling but not surprising. Research confirms that early alcohol use can increase risk for alcohol abuse and dependence later in life. Underage drinking can occur in a wide range of youth. Some may be at low risk of reoffending while for others, it is the beginning of increasingly serious alcohol problems.ⁱ

Most parents and youth fail to acknowledge that underage drinking can pose genuine immediate and long-term risks. When young people are caught in violation of the minimum drinking age law, consequences are often minimal. Even among legislators and some judges, there is a pervasive mindset that underage drinking is part of a self-limiting stage that teens will outgrow and it poses minimal long-term effects.

A growing body of research supports screening and assessments for all underage drinkers at the time of an underage alcohol policy violation resulting in arrest or an alcohol-related injury to identify warning signs and other challenges. When adolescents screen positive for one risky behavior, it is a good marker to look for others.ⁱⁱ A screening is a basic tool used with every youth intake to identify characteristics beyond drinking patterns (mental health needs, substance abuse needs, increased risk for recidivism, etc.). These brief screenings allow youth to be categorized into two basic categories which can provide early warning for emergencies and help determine the need for a more detailed and individualized assessment.ⁱⁱⁱ

Youth assessment coupled with a simultaneous brief intervention for parents could be a powerful tool in helping break dangerous cycles which may go unrecognized. The youth screening/parent intervention would provide facts that contradict assumptions about the harmlessness of underage drinking, test messaging methods and styles with teens and parents, and determine what type of brief intervention might bring about lasting change. This two-part outreach to youth and parents using a violation or injury as a teachable moment appears to be underutilized.

Research Highlights:

- Underage drinking can occur in a wide range of youth. Some may be at low risk of reoffending while for others, it is the beginning of increasingly serious alcohol problems.^{iv}
- In adolescents, studies of brief motivational interviews for alcohol interventions have shown promise.^v
- A meta-analysis supported the effectiveness of motivational interviewing interventions for adolescent substance use.^{vi}
- Drug and alcohol treatment can be effective in deterring youth from future drug abuse and criminal offending.^{vii}
- Youth should be screened for alcohol problems regularly throughout their supervision, criminal justice professionals should develop an individual case plan for each youth and professionals should match interventions with a youth's needs and assets and participation in programs should be monitored.^{viii}

- Respondents in the *Second Chance* program demonstrated an increase in their knowledge, improvement in their attitudes, a decrease in being in trouble, and a decrease in their alcohol and/or drug use.
 - *Second Chance* is an early intervention program aimed at educating students about the dangers of alcohol and drug use and getting them back on track for a healthy and productive life. The program is a collaborative effort of the Arlington, Virginia Public Schools, county government, local courts, Phoenix House of Mid-Atlantic, and the Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility. An evaluation of the program revealed statistically significant increases between groups (intervention and control) and over time on four of five composite scales.^{ix}

Responsibility.org Position:

The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility supports screening and brief interventions for underage drinkers at the time of an underage alcohol policy violation resulting in arrest or an alcohol-related injury. The screenings and brief interventions should identify potential abuse and dependence, effective treatment (when indicated), and brief interventions for their parents.

ⁱ <http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/237231.pdf> (APPA/OJJDP/PIRE Underage Drinking Intervention Principles & Practice Guidelines for Community Corrections)

ⁱⁱ <http://www.slideshare.net/Drdennisembry/biglan-et-al-the-critical-role-of-nurturing-environments-for-promoting-human-well-being-257>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://csgjusticecenter.org/documents/0000/1525/Juvenile_Behavioral_Health_-_Williams.pdf

^{iv} <http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/237231.pdf> (APPA/OJJDP/PIRE Underage Drinking Intervention Principles & Practice Guidelines for Community Corrections)

^v <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2916874/> (Evidence for Optimism: Behavior Therapies and Motivational Interviewing in Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment)

^{vi} Jensen et al., 2011

^{vii} NIDA 2007

^{viii} <http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/237147.pdf> (Community Supervision of Underage Drinkers)

^{ix} LTG Associates, Inc., October 2012-June 2013