

WHAT IS ALCOHOLISM?

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CREDITS

Executive Producer

Anson W. Schloat

Producer

John G. Young

Consultants

Susan F. Tapert
Department of Psychiatry
University of California, San Diego

Teacher's Resource Book

Elizabeth Hoover

Laurie Woods

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WHAT IS ALCOHOLISM?

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Scientists are now beginning to understand the strong connection between early drinking and the onset of alcoholism. New research indicates that young people who begin drinking alcohol before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence at some time in their lives than those who have their first drink at age 20 or older. In part, this connection can be explained by new research involving alcohol's effects on the developing brain of a teen. Chemical changes caused by alcohol can actually "hardwire" a teen's brain for addiction—not just addiction to alcohol, but to other drugs as well. Combine this with a young person's lack of tolerance and experience with drinking, and the results become quite dangerous.

Social environment and genetic factors also place some teens at a higher risk of developing alcoholism than others. Like its adult counterpart, teen alcoholism crosses all ethnic, social and economic lines. It affects drinkers and non-drinkers alike in the form of drunk driving, acquaintance rape and other violent crimes. Social, academic and family problems rapidly multiply once a teen begins to abuse alcohol. To complicate matters, many parents are unaware of their children's early drinking experiences. Alcohol is so readily available in our society that secretive drinking is relatively easy. Even parents who know about teen drinking may dismiss it as a necessary rite-of-passage, not realizing the long-term risks associated with it.

This places the educator in an important position. Because alcoholism is responsible for more social ills than any other single factor in our society, its dangers cannot be overstressed. However, beyond simply telling young people to say "no" to alcohol, educators must give students interesting, real-life examples of how alcohol abuse and alcoholism can wreak havoc on their futures. In addition, teachers must stress the positives of choosing not to drink—a strengthened self-image and a lowered risk of later problems. *What Is Alcoholism?* helps educators do just that. Its approach is similar to other education programs that have successfully encouraged students not to use alcohol. It also includes positive information to initiate self-change in those who already have begun to drink.

This Teacher's Resource Book is filled with facts and realistic situations that every student can identify with. The activities and fact sheets will help students see the wide scope of this devastating problem. As active participants, students will work together to learn more about teen drinking and alcoholism, find ways to combat the problem in their own lives and in the lives of their friends, and strengthen their beliefs about responsibility and good decision making.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After watching the video *What is Alcoholism?* and participating in the class activities included in this Teacher's Resource Book, your students will be able to:

- recognize the symptoms of alcoholism
- identify the difference between alcohol use, alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence
- better understand how alcoholism damages a person's health, safety, friendships and future
- explore safe alternatives to drinking that can reduce the risk of alcoholism
- better understand and discuss the risks of alcoholism
- learn how alcoholism contributes to a variety of social ills including accidents, domestic problems and violent crimes
- recognize and correct common misconceptions and myths about alcoholism
- discuss life goals and recognize how alcoholism might compromise them
- explore how alcoholism in the family can affect each member
- understand how alcoholism poses special risks for young people

As the program begins, we hear the words of young people whose lives have been harmed by drinking alcohol. “Sometimes I would wake up next to strange people... and want to know what happened to me,” says one teen. “I could have choked on my own vomit,” says another. Two of the young people admit to being alcoholics, while one young woman shakes her head and says, “I don’t think I’m an alcoholic, but man... people say I am.”

After the title *What Is Alcoholism?* appears on-screen, we are introduced to Dr. Susan F. Tapert, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego. Dr. Tapert explains that alcoholism is a diagnosis made by a counselor or doctor that refers to having at least three problems related to alcohol. These include withdrawal symptoms, an increased tolerance to alcohol, an inability to limit drinking, an inability to stop drinking even when alcohol is causing problems, and noticing that alcohol is taking up a lot of your time. Dr. Tapert explains that someone who has three or more of these problems in a single year should seek help for alcoholism, which is also known as alcohol dependence.

The next segment is titled **Who Is At Risk?** It offers a discussion of the stereotypes that surround alcoholism. Lacey, a teen alcoholic, says that most of her friends don’t think young people can become addicted to alcohol. Dr. Tapert explains that anyone can become an alcoholic, regardless of age, gender or socioeconomic status. She also says that young people with an alcoholic parent are two to four times more likely to develop alcoholism, and that someone who starts drinking before age 14 also has a greater risk. The young alcoholics profiled admit to having their first drinks at the ages of 7, 9, 11 and 8 respectively.

The section **What Is Alcohol Abuse?** explains the difference between alcoholism and alcohol abuse. Dr. Tapert says that alcohol abuse can include several problems that do not necessarily involve tolerance or withdrawal. These include driving under the influence of alcohol, and continuing to drink even after personal relationships begin to suffer as a result of drinking.

In the **Health Problems** section, Dr. Tapert lists several serious side effects of heavy drinking, including bone weakness, ulcers, tooth loss, immune problems and liver disease. She also mentions recent studies pointing to the serious effects that drinking can have on a young person’s brain and central nervous system. Tests have shown memory and thinking ability to be significantly affected.

Indirect Health Problems is introduced as Justin describes an alcohol-related bike wreck that knocked out several of his teeth. Dr. Tapert explains that drinking alcohol decreases a person’s ability to make good decisions, while lowering their reflexes and coordination. When combined, these factors can lead to a host of problems, including car accidents, falls, fights, legal problems and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

The section called **Emotional Crutch** describes alcohol's role as a depressant. "When a person drinks," explains Dr. Tapert, "it can slow down brain activity. Sometimes people find they aren't as worried about things." Some of the young alcoholics agree. However, according to Dr. Tapert, as a person sobers up, she feels "even more anxious or depressed than before. Alcohol actually makes it worse because the brain is changed in ways that make it harder to deal with these kinds of emotions."

The **My Problem** section explores the difficulties that some drinkers have in recognizing that they have a problem with alcohol. Lacey explains that she blamed her problems on other things, like her mom or her school, before she could admit that her drinking was the real issue. Dr. Tapert says that 15 to 20 percent of people in the US have had a problem with alcohol. Still, young people continue to drink because alcohol is relatively easy to get and doesn't have the stigma of other drugs, like cocaine.

In **Finding Help**, Dr. Tapert encourages anyone who might have a problem with alcohol to try spending one month without alcohol. If that idea is scary or doesn't sound reasonable, she suggests talking with someone about getting help. Lacey describes the day that she finally approached her school counselor and began getting help from a high school student who was a recovering alcoholic. "When I was talking to her," says Lacey, "I was like...what's wrong with me? I thought I was the only person who felt like I did." After hearing the other girl's story, Lacey realized that she wasn't the only one and that things could get better.

Dr. Tapert encourages those who might have a drinking problem to seek out Alcoholics Anonymous. It's a free resource, and meetings take place in nearly every community across the country. Justin describes hearing stories at AA about "grown people who lost their whole lives—their kids, their house, their jobs, their car, everything—over alcohol. It made me think about where I'd be in 15 years." He also tells viewers that the only requirement for membership in Alcoholics Anonymous is "the desire to stop using."

Things to Do Instead of Drinking encourages young people to find healthy activities that don't involve alcohol. Since becoming sober, Lacey has taken up jewelry making and ceramics. She says, "My life is full of busy things and fun things that I never would have imagined doing." Justin suggests riding a bike because "you're thinking of everything that is going on right then. You're not thinking of all your other problems."

In conclusion, Dr. Tapert tells viewers not to be afraid or anxious if the information in the video has raised red flags about their own behaviors. If a drinking problem is recognized, there are many steps to take and many places to get help. Justin tells viewers, "There's really no point to drinking. It took away a lot from my life. It didn't add anything." In the closing shot, as Lacey looks out at the ocean, she says, "I've been sober for two years and two months. I like my life now."

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Name: _____

1. Alcoholism is a disease.
 - a) True
 - b) False

2. Alcoholism is strictly genetic.
 - a) True
 - b) False

3. Alcohol addiction is defined as:
 - a) drinking alcohol
 - b) experiencing negative effects from alcohol.
 - c) continuing to use alcohol in spite of negative consequences
 - d) compulsive use of alcohol, regardless of the consequences

4. Most people with alcohol dependence sooner or later seek treatment for their disease.
 - a) True
 - b) False

5. Learning to drink is a part of growing up for teenagers, with no long term consequences.
 - a) True
 - b) False

6. Tolerance for alcohol increases the more you use it, so it is not doing as much harm.
 - a) True
 - b) False

7. Alcoholism is responsible for more social ills than any other factor in our society.
 - a) True
 - b) False

8. You can recognize an alcoholic easily by the fact that they are always drunk.
 - a) True
 - b) False

9. The best way for an alcoholic to stop drinking is to cut down little by little.
 - a) True
 - b) False

10. If an alcoholic stops drinking, he/she will immediately feel better.
 - a) True
 - b) False

Name: _____

Answer Key

1. A
2. B
3. D
4. B
5. B
6. B
7. A
8. B
9. B
10. B

Name: _____

Research one of the topics below, and write a brief paper on your findings. You can gather information at your school or local library, as well as on the Internet. Use a *Resource Tracker* (Activity Sheet 1b) to collect information.

- alcoholism and D.U.I.
- teen alcoholism
- alcohol's effects on the development of young minds
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- alcoholism and domestic abuse
- risks facing children of alcoholics
- alcoholism and homelessness
- alcoholism and suicide
- drinking in the workplace
- alcoholism and crime
- alcoholism's link to accidental deaths (drowning, falls, etc.)

Name: _____

ACTIVITY 3

VIDEO QUOTES

The quotes below are taken from the video *What Is Alcoholism?* Choose one of the quotes and write a short essay describing how you feel about the quote. Keep these questions in mind as you prepare your essay:

Do you agree or disagree with the speaker? Why or why not?

Does the quote remind you of a situation in your own life? Explain.

Does the quote remind you of a friend? Explain.

What would you say to the speaker if you could?

“I don’t think I’m an alcoholic, but man... people say I am.”
—Christine

“In Alcoholics Anonymous, I heard stories of grown people who lost their whole lives—their kids, their house, their jobs, their car, everything—over alcohol. It made me think about where I’d be in 15 years.”
—Justin

“[The first time I drank,] I liked it, even though I blacked out and people told me I was being very stupid.”
—Lacee

“There’s really no point to drinking. It took away a lot from my life. It didn’t add anything.”
—Justin

“I know I put myself in bad situations... drinking alcohol with barbiturates, which is a sure way to die.”
—Lacee

Name: _____

How Do You Use ALCOHOL?

The questions below are directed at people who drink alcohol. Read the following questions and answer them honestly. The purpose of this sheet is to give you a chance to think about the ways in which you may be using alcoholic beverages—including beer. There are no right or wrong answers. You will not have to share your answers with anyone.

Have you ever:

		Yes or No
1.	Made plans to go out drinking, sometimes days in advance?	
2.	Gulped or “chugged” your drink, maybe in a contest?	
3.	Decided to limit the amount you drank, but then ignored your limit?	
4.	Had more than two drinks in one hour?	
5.	Encouraged others to drink with you?	
6.	Found yourself drinking alcohol that you didn’t really want?	
7.	Decided to have a drink without asking yourself why?	
8.	Feared that your reputation has changed because of alcohol use?	
9.	Drank alcohol while taking a prescription drug or over-the-counter medicine?	
10.	Forgotten what happened while you were drinking?	
11.	Covered up for your drinking?	
12.	Decided to have a drink to relieve boredom or anxiety?	
13.	Asked someone else to purchase alcohol for you?	
14.	Purposely tuned out what you heard about the physical damage that alcohol can cause?	
15.	Missed time from school because of a hangover?	
How many times did you answer YES?		

This activity is continued on the next page.

Name: _____

Interpreting your score:

If you answered **Yes** to any of these questions, you may be abusing alcohol. Two or more **Yes** responses could be a sign of real trouble. You may want to consider talking to someone about your alcohol use. Reread the questions and think about how each **Yes** answer affected or could affect your life.

For more help, refer to the *What is Alcoholism?* and *What Is Alcohol Abuse?* fact sheets.

Name: _____

SOMEONE ELSE'S DRINKING

Alateen is an international organization for young people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. The following questions can help you decide whether or not Alateen is for you. For each question, choose Yes (Y), Sometimes (S), or No (N).

	Y / S / N
1. Do you have a parent, close friend or relative whose drinking upsets you?	
2. Are holidays and gatherings spoiled because of drinking?	
3. Do you tell lies to cover up for someone else's drinking or what's happening in your home?	
4. Do you stay out of the house as much as possible because of someone's drinking?	
5. Are you afraid to upset someone for fear it will set off a drinking bout?	
6. Are you afraid or embarrassed to bring your friends home because of someone's drinking?	
7. Do you think the drinker's behavior is caused by you, other members of your family, friends, or rotten breaks in life?	
8. Do you make threats such as, "If you don't stop drinking, I'll run away"?	
9. Do you make promises about behavior, such as, "I'll get better school marks, go to church or keep my room clean" in exchange for a promise that drinking will stop?	
10. Do you feel that if your mom or dad loved you, he or she would stop drinking?	
11. Do you have money problems because of someone else's drinking?	
12. Are mealtimes frequently delayed because of the drinker?	

This activity is continued on the next page.

Name: _____

SOMEONE ELSE'S DRINKING

13. Have you considered calling the police because of the drinker's abusive behavior?	
14. Do you think your problems would be solved if the drinking stopped?	
15. Do you ever treat people (teachers, schoolmates, teammates, etc.) unjustly because you are angry with someone else for drinking too much?	
How many times did you answer YES?	
How many times did you answer SOMETIMES?	
How many times did you answer NO?	

If you answered Yes or Sometimes to any to any of the questions above, your life is being seriously affected by someone's drinking. You have a right to get help. For advice or help, contact Alateen by looking in your local telephone directory, or by calling (800) 344-2666. You can also write to:

Al-Anon Family Groups, Inc.
World Service Office
P.O. Box 862
New York, NY 10018

Adapted from "Are You Troubled By Someone's Drinking?" Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. ©1980

Name: _____

Correct each myth below by researching the reality. Then write a corrected statement below each myth.

1. Teenagers rarely become alcoholics.

2. Most alcoholics do not have jobs.

3. Drinking beer will not lead to alcoholism.

4. Most alcoholics are poor.

5. Alcoholics can learn to drink alcohol responsibly.

6. Adults have a greater risk of becoming addicted to alcohol than teenagers.

7. Alcoholics are easy to recognize because they are always drunk.

8. Alcoholism is a disease that can be completely cured.

When you have finished, please consult the Answer Key on the next page.

Answer Key

- 1. Teenagers rarely become alcoholics.**
Teens who drink have a greater risk of alcoholism than adults who drink. It also takes less time for a teen to become an alcoholic. Many people wrongly believe that alcohol addiction is primarily an adult problem because those seeking treatment are most often adults. The truth is, it simply takes most people years to recognize and accept their addictions.
- 2. Most alcoholics do not have jobs.**
Most alcoholics are functional members of society with jobs, families and social lives. They may seem totally normal to most of the people around them.
- 3. Drinking beer will not lead to alcoholism.**
Any kind of alcohol consumption can lead to alcoholism. Beer is a common gateway drink for young drinkers. Those who begin to abuse alcohol often (but not always) move on to hard liquor as their addiction progresses.
- 4. Most alcoholics are poor.**
Alcoholism happens to people from every social, ethnic, racial and economic background.
- 5. Alcoholics can learn to drink alcohol responsibly.**
Alcoholism is a serious condition that involves strong cravings for alcohol. These cravings will never completely diminish in an alcoholic, even after years of abstinence. The best choice for an alcoholic is total abstinence from drinking.
- 6. Adults have a greater risk of becoming addicted to alcohol than teenagers.**
New research indicates that young people who begin drinking alcohol before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence at some time in their lives than those who have their first drink at age 20 or older. In part, this connection can be explained by new research involving alcohol's effects on the developing brain of a teen. Chemical changes caused by alcohol can actually "hardwire" a teen's brain for addiction—not just addiction to alcohol, but to other drugs as well.
- 7. Alcoholics are easy to recognize because they are always drunk.**
Many alcoholics make great efforts to fit into society and hide their alcohol addiction. In addition, their high tolerance levels make it harder for others to see how alcohol affects them. An alcoholic who has been hiding his or her drinking for years may only be discovered by a close friend or relative.
- 8. Alcoholism is a disease that can be completely cured.**
Many groups distinguish alcoholism as a disease that can never be cured. Although symptoms can be brought under control, the alcoholic will always have some degree of alcohol cravings and impaired control over his or her drinking.

Name: _____

Over time, alcohol can have harmful effects on every system of the body. Use the Internet and library resources to learn more about the specific physical risks of heavy drinking. Write at least one potential negative effect for each body system or part listed below.

Brain:

Liver:

Stomach:

Muscles:

Heart:

Pancreas:

Reproductive System:

When you are finished, compare your results with the information found in the *Alcohol & The Body* fact sheet.

Name: _____

Sometimes people drink alcohol because they want to fit in, or because they think drinking will make them feel better about themselves. For each of the examples listed below, come up with four alternative activities you can do that don't involve drinking.

List four things you can do at a party.

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

List four things you can do on a date.

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

List four things you can do when you are bored.

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

This activity is continued on the next page.

Name: _____

List four things you can do with friends on the weekend.

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

List four things you can do on a rainy day.

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

List four things you can do when you are in a rotten mood.

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

Name: _____

Since alcohol is a depressant, it can numb a person's feelings of anxiety or nervousness. But once the alcohol wears off, the drinker's anxiety (and problems) come right back. This numbing effect can trick people into thinking that alcohol increases their confidence and emotional satisfaction. The truth is, alcohol changes chemicals in the brain, making the drinker feel more anxious than ever.

Instead of learning to solve problems in a healthy way, the problem drinker begins to need alcohol to cope. All the while, the brain is processing fewer "feel good" chemicals on its own. That's why many alcoholics need medication for depression, even years after they have stopped drinking.

Read the story below.

Tori and Angelina are best friends. One night at a party, they both have their first drink. Tori, who has always been very shy, feels relaxed enough to talk and meet new people. Angelina finds herself babbling and acting silly. She gets embarrassed and decides not to have another drink. During the next year, the girls get into a pattern. Angelina goes to a party with Tori, who quickly gets drunk and spends the evening acting like a wild party girl. Angelina knows that Tori's parents are getting a divorce, so she doesn't say anything. She figures Tori deserves to have a good time. Tori doesn't even know that Angelina's parents are splitting up too. Angelina has found a new friend to share her problems with.

Keeping in mind what you know about alcohol's effects on emotions and the brain, write a description of Tori and Angelina as they appear at their 10-year class reunion. Assume that the pattern they developed in high school has continued. Use your creativity to come up with an original story on a separate sheet of paper. Here are some questions to get you started:

- How have they learned to cope with problems?
- What paths have they taken?
- Are they still friends?
- Have they accomplished the goals that they aimed for in high school?

Name: _____

Divide the class into two equal groups. Using one of the debate topics below, one group must argue *yes* and the other group must argue *no*. Each side must support its position with researched facts and valid, respectful arguments.

1

Many treatment centers and healthcare professionals describe alcoholism as a disease. Is this always true? Or can alcoholism be a behavior choice? If some alcoholics inherit the disease from a parent, what about those who do not have an alcoholic parent? And if alcoholism is a disease, can it be cured? Can the alcoholic ever drink responsibly again? Why or why not?

2

Should medical insurance companies cover treatment for alcoholics? Would this reduce social ills such as homelessness, violent crime and domestic abuse? Should everyone be responsible for paying higher insurance premiums in order to treat others' alcohol or drug problems? Why or why not?

3

In the last few years, several women who have given birth to children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome have been charged with child abuse. At least one was charged with murder. Are these fair charges? Should an alcoholic mother spend time in jail because she was unable or unwilling to stop drinking during pregnancy? Why or why not? Is this a valid solution to the problem? What other solutions exist?

4

Research shows that alcohol companies have targeted people as young as 14 with ads promoting beer, wine coolers and other alcoholic beverages. If these ads can be shown to increase the risk of teen alcoholism, should the companies be held responsible? Why or why not? What kind of penalties should apply?

Name: _____

PART 1:

In the space below, list five things you want to do with your life before you turn 40. Some ideas might include writing a book, learning to speak a new language, teaching a class on your favorite subject, inventing a new product—even curing a disease. Try to be very specific with your ideas and make sure they are goals that truly interest you.

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

- 5 _____

PART 2:

Now think about what you have learned about alcoholism. Heavy drinking has been shown to decrease a person’s ability to think, remember and perform. It also causes many physical problems that can lead to illness and early death. Those who abuse alcohol also have a high risk of emotional disorders such as depression. Finally, alcoholism can lead to social and legal problems, including loss of driving privileges, heavy fines and jail time. With these facts in mind, explain how alcoholism could affect each of your goals.

- 1 _____

- 2 _____

- 3 _____

- 4 _____

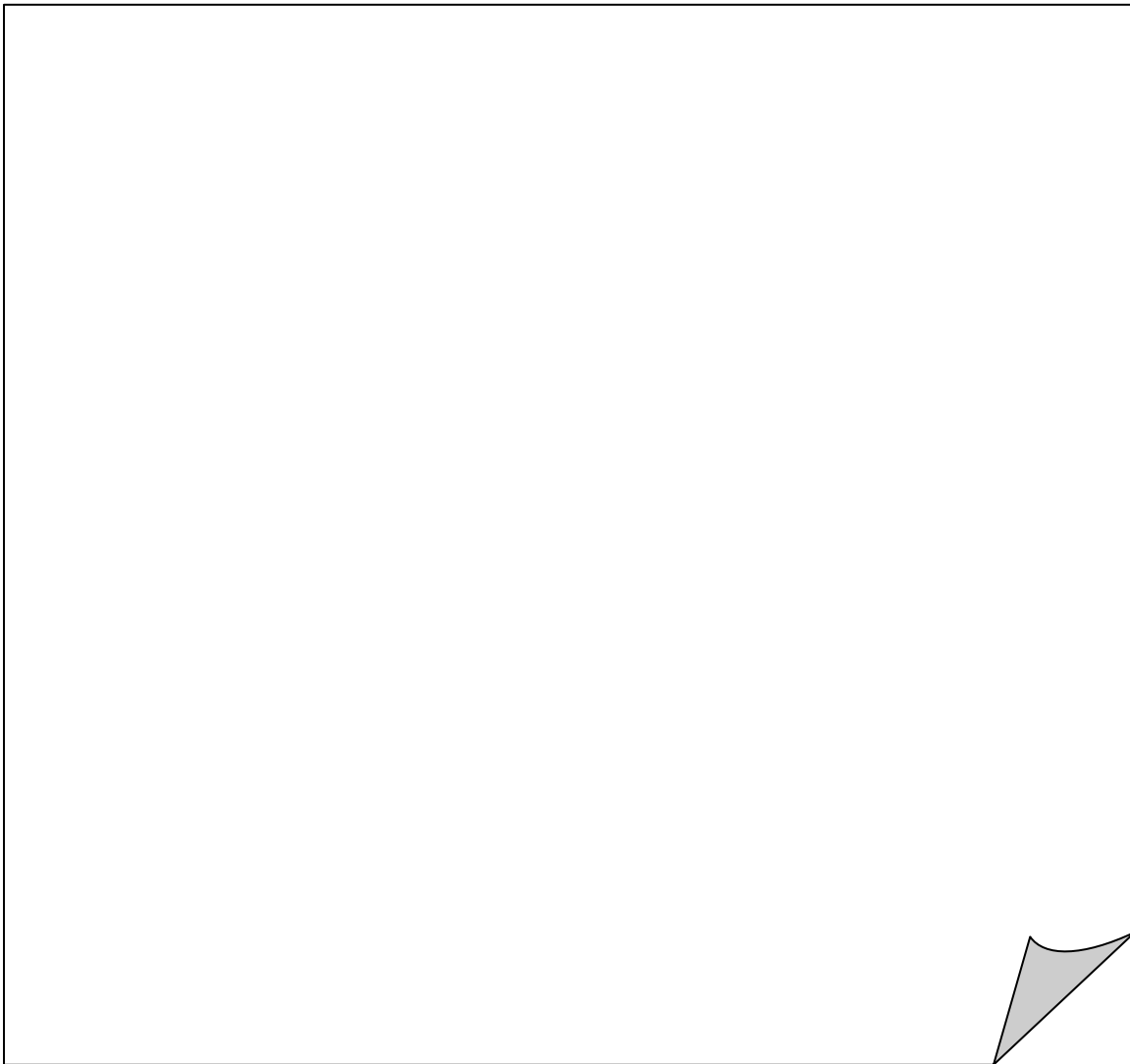
- 5 _____

Name: _____

In alcoholic families, things are often not what they seem. Each person in the family may feel obliged to play a role in order to cope with the painful fact that one family member is addicted to alcohol. Some of the most common roles are described in *The Alcoholic Family* fact sheet.

Many people hide behind masks. For this exercise, use your imagination. Write a story, a poem, or a play. Make a collage. Draw a picture. Sketch a cartoon. Sculpt a figure. Whatever you choose, your creative work should focus on the theme of masks. What masks do you wear? What lies beneath the surface of your mask? Does your mask help you to cope with reality, or does it prevent you from seeing things as they really are?

Use the space below to plan your creative work.



Name: _____

Alcoholics and others who abuse alcohol can be very good at hiding their drinking. But friends and family members who pay attention will usually see signs or symptoms warning them of a problem. The tricky part is knowing how and when to respond to these signs.

Read each situation below. Then write a paragraph describing how you would respond. If your response includes talking to the person in trouble, include the words you would use. You may want to consult the *Helping Others* fact sheet for tips on how to handle the situation.

1

Your friend Trey has taken up heavy drinking as his newest hobby. He started drinking at parties, but now he doesn't need a special occasion. He spends most of the weekend in bed, recovering from a hangover. When he's not drinking, Trey acts really moody and nervous. He's blown up at you several times for no reason at all. You miss the old Trey, but you're also angry about the way he's been acting. Trey's father is an alcoholic, and you worry that Trey is developing his own addiction to alcohol. When you bring it up, Trey says he doesn't need another mother, then he storms off.

2

You and Jamal have been best friends since elementary school. In the last couple of years, Jamal has started hitting the alcohol pretty hard. Sometimes at parties, he makes a total idiot of himself. He tells people things he shouldn't, and he gets really clumsy. Usually, he doesn't even remember what he did. A few times, you've taken his keys because you didn't want him driving home. Last week, he found the keys and sneaked off to his car. He drove himself home, even though he promised you that he wouldn't. Today you found out that Jamal drove two other people home after he'd been drinking. Now you aren't just worried about him, but about others who might get hurt.

3

Kelli was always someone you could count on—no matter what. But ever since she spent the summer with her dad, she's been different. She made some new friends at her dad's, and they did a lot of drinking. Kelli wrote about it in her letters to you. When she got home, she swore off alcohol forever. But you've seen liquor bottles hidden in her room and you've smelled alcohol on her breath at school. When you asked her about it, she just laughed and said you were hallucinating. Now she talks to you less and less. Summer break is coming up, and you're afraid things will get even worse when she goes back to her dad's.

FACT SHEETS

Name: _____

Alcoholism, also known as “alcohol dependence,” is a disease that includes alcohol cravings and continued drinking despite repeated alcohol-related problems, such as losing a job or getting into trouble with the law. Alcoholism includes four symptoms:

Craving: A strong need or compulsion to drink.

Impaired control: The inability to limit one’s drinking on any given occasion.

Physical dependence: Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety, when alcohol use is stopped after a period of heavy drinking.

Tolerance: The need for increasing amounts of alcohol in order to feel its effects.

The Stages of Alcoholism

Use:

defined simply as drinking or consuming alcohol

Misuse:

experiencing negative consequences resulting from the use of alcohol

Abuse:

continuing to use alcohol in spite of negative consequences

Dependency/Addiction:

compulsive use of alcohol, regardless of negative consequences

WHAT IS ALCOHOL ABUSE?

Alcohol abuse is different from alcoholism. It does not include an extremely strong craving for alcohol, loss of control, or physical dependence. In addition, alcohol abuse is less likely than alcoholism to include tolerance (needing increasing amounts of alcohol in order to feel the effects).

Alcohol abuse is defined as a pattern of drinking that is accompanied by one or more of the following situations within a 12-month period:

- Failure to fulfill major work, school, or home responsibilities because of alcohol
- Drinking in situations that are physically dangerous, such as while driving a car or operating machinery
- Recurring alcohol-related legal problems, such as being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or for physically hurting someone while drunk
- Continued drinking despite having ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by the effects of alcohol

Here are some warning signs that could be clues to alcohol abuse or alcoholism:

- Slurred speech
- Smell of beer or liquor on breath
- Irresponsible behavior followed by excuses
- “Dry Drunk” syndrome (person is irritable, sarcastic and restless when not drinking)
- Drinking alone
- Blotchy or red spots on face (“gin blossoms”)
- Hiding the use of alcohol from friends and family
- Using alcohol to cope with difficult situations
- Depending on alcohol in social situations
- Drinking at unusual times
- Consuming alcohol at work or at school
- Getting drunk regularly or more often than in the past
- Losing periods of time, blackouts
- Experiencing hangovers
- Missing time from work or school because of drinking
- Becoming defensive when others criticize drinking habits
- Lower academic performance
- Spending long periods of time trying to obtain alcohol
- Spending long periods of time recovering from the effects of alcohol

If you know someone who shows three or more of these symptoms, he or she may be abusing alcohol. There are places that you can turn to get help. See the *Getting Help* fact sheet for more information.

Name: _____

Alcohol is the most abused drug in the United States. It contains a chemical called ethanol, a depressant that slows down brain activity, reflexes and other physical skills.

Short-Term Risks:

- Makes it harder to think clearly and make good decisions, which can lead to problems like unwanted pregnancy, STDs, or involvement in a crime.
- Changes vision, balance and coordination—all of which greatly increase the risk of an accident, such as a car crash or drowning.
- Is illegal for those under 21—even at home or under the supervision of a parent. Driving while under the influence of alcohol is illegal at any age. Breaking these laws can lead to heavy fines, loss of driver's license or jail time.
- Drinking too much alcohol too quickly can lead to alcohol poisoning—blackouts, coma or death.
- Can change behavior and emotions, making a person act foolish, clumsy, angry or loud.
- Can cause painful hangover symptoms, including stomach pains, vomiting and diarrhea.
- Can cause bloodshot eyes, pimple breakouts, and bad breath.

Long-Term Risks:

- Lowered immune system and increased risk of diseases
- Cancer of the mouth and throat
- Cirrhosis of the liver, a disease that is often fatal
- Painful stomach ulcers
- Cancer of the pancreas
- Weakened heart muscles and an irregular heartbeat
- Permanent brain damage
- Kidney failure
- Weakened muscles and bones
- High blood pressure

Name: _____

ALCOHOL MYTHS

MYTH: Alcohol affects everyone the same way.

FACT: *Many factors affect reactions to alcohol, including body weight, mental state, and time of day. Young people are more negatively affected by alcohol than adults because their minds and bodies are still developing.*

MYTH: Drinking alcohol is part of growing up.

FACT: *Millions of young people choose not to drink. For them, there are dozens of other activities and events that signify growing up. Using alcohol and other drugs is not a “necessary” step on the path to adulthood.*

MYTH: Beer will not do permanent damage.

FACT: *All forms of alcohol present risks for the mind and body. A beer contains the same amount of alcohol found in a glass of wine, a wine cooler, a shot of whiskey, or the average mixed drink. Large amounts of alcohol, in any form, can do damage to the brain, heart, liver, and stomach.*

MYTH: The worst thing that can happen to a drinker is a bad hangover.

FACT: *The risks of drinking go far beyond the effects of a hangover. These risks include alcohol poisoning, car crashes, suicide, involvement in a crime, and unprotected sex leading to pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection.*

MYTH: It’s much worse for a teenager to use drugs than to drink alcohol.

FACT: *First of all, alcohol is a drug. In fact, it is the most abused drug in our society. It leads to addiction and health problems that destroy lives. Secondly, drinking alcohol at an early age increases the risk of alcohol addiction, as well as addiction to other drugs.*

MYTH: Harm to the body doesn’t happen until after years of drinking.

FACT: *New research proves that drinking alcohol can have long-lasting effects on a person’s brain function—especially when the person drinks heavily at a young age. These effects can become evident immediately after drinking and may last for many years.*

MYTH: Adults have drinking problems more often than young people.

FACT: *Alcohol addiction can happen to anyone. In fact, the younger a person starts drinking, the greater the risk of addiction. Many people wrongly believe that alcohol addiction is primarily an adult problem because those seeking treatment are most often adults. In truth, it simply takes most people years to recognize and accept their addictions.*

Name: _____

- Young people who drink alcohol are more likely to become addicted than adults who drink.
- It takes five to 10 years for an adult to become addicted to alcohol, but a young person can become addicted in just one to two years.
- Having one drink after another, or binge drinking, is becoming a serious killer of young people. Binge drinking can cause alcohol poisoning, which can lead to coma or sudden death.
- A person with an alcoholic parent is two to four times more likely to become an alcoholic.
- Hundreds of kids under 15 are taken to emergency rooms each year for alcohol poisoning. In addition to death, alcohol poisoning can cause heart, liver and brain damage.
- On average, young people who drink alcohol have lower grades and a higher risk of dropping out of school. Students who drink are also five times more likely to fail a grade.
- About two-thirds of all young people who get arrested were drinking alcohol at the time.
- It is against the law for people under 21 to use or buy alcohol, even if they are at home or under the supervision of their parents.
- For teens, alcohol is a major factor in date rapes, unwanted pregnancy and the contraction of sexually transmitted infections like HIV.
- Teens are more likely than adults to lose control and make poor decisions. Teens who drink have a higher risk of involvement in fights, vandalism and violent crimes.

Name: _____

Alcohol use has been reported in 67 percent of all homicides.

People who drink alcohol are 16 times more likely than others to die in falls, and 10 times more likely to become fire or burn victims

Alcohol intoxication is common in rape cases. Nearly 75 percent of assailants and 55 percent of their victims were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the attack.

Between 25-36 percent of suicide victims were using alcohol shortly before their deaths.

Over 45 percent of deaths among 18- to 20-year olds are alcohol-related.

Alcohol is a significant factor in all leading causes of death for 15- to 24-year-olds—including drunk driving, homicide, suicide, fires, drowning, and AIDS.

More than 50 percent of all fatal car crashes are alcohol-related.

Alcohol is responsible for more than 38 percent of drowning deaths each year.

Nearly 6,000 people under the age of 25 die in alcohol-related car crashes each year.

95 percent of all violent crimes occurring on college campuses is alcohol-related. More than 90 percent of all reported rapes on college campuses involved the use of alcohol by the victim, the perpetrator, or both.

Research shows that teenagers who drink are more likely to:

- attempt and complete suicide
- be physically or sexually abused
- be perpetrators of violence as well as victims of violence
- be killed in car accidents
- become infected with sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- cause unwanted pregnancies
- die in accidents such as drownings or falls
- die of alcohol poisoning
- develop an addiction to alcohol
- be harmed doing foolish stunts
- have problems in school, including social and academic problems
- have problems with family and friends

ROLES IN THE ALCOHOLIC FAMILY

Living in an alcoholic family is difficult. Family members often assume unhealthy roles in order to cope with the tremendous tensions caused by one person's alcohol use. The explanations below will help you understand the roles that family members often play in an alcoholic family.

The Star

Always at the center of the family, the Star is so focused on alcohol that everything else becomes secondary. Even though the Star may deny it, the only thing he/she really cares about is alcohol.

The Enabler

This family member is totally focused on the alcoholic, often to the degree that he/she does not pay attention to anything else. Instead of taking care of normal family needs, the Enabler has learned to adjust to a chaotic lifestyle, where the drinker is always the first priority.

The Hero

This family member is the overachiever—the one who does everything possible to fit in and avoid causing problems for the family. Typically, the Hero is a perfectionist who doesn't know how to ask others for help, yet feels a tremendous burden to fix everyone else's problems.

The Scapegoat

This family member is often seen as the troublemaker—the one who is blamed for all the family's problems. The Scapegoat is usually rebellious and has trouble expressing anger in a constructive way. This person has learned that the best way to attract attention is by resorting to destructive and/or negative behaviors.

The Clown

This family member relies on high energy and bright spirits in an effort to relieve the family's pain. The Clown is always ready to distract other family members from the problems of alcoholism, and often resorts to humor for comic relief. This person usually has trouble taking himself/herself seriously.

The Forgotten Child

This family member withdraws from the rest of the group in an effort to escape from the problems of living in an alcoholic family. By seeking relief from the chaotic family structure, the Forgotten Child also becomes isolated from the rest of society in ways that can be unhealthy and cause problems of self-esteem and assertiveness.

Name: _____

ALCOHOLISM AND THE FAMILY

Estimated number of American children under the age of 18 years who live in households with at least one alcoholic parent—6.6 million.

NIAAA, Alcohol Alert, No. 9, 7/90, p. 1

One out of every eight teenagers in the country live in an alcoholic family.

Children of Alcoholics Foundation Press Release, July 24, 1996

Alcohol companies deliberately design their ads to appeal to heavy drinkers. Why? Because if all of society's alcoholics were to recover and stop drinking alcohol forever, the alcohol industry's gross revenues would be cut by more than 50 percent

Answer based on NCADI "Recent Liquor Industry Statistics"

Alcohol is present in more than 50 percent of all incidents of domestic violence, with women most likely to be battered when both partners have been drinking.

J. Collins & P Messerschmidt, "Epidemiology of Alcohol-Related Violence," Alcohol Health & Research World {AHRW}, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1993, p. 96

Only 55 percent of all women of childbearing age recognize the term "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome" or realize the possible damage that alcohol can cause to an unborn child.

Connecticut Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, 1996

By the age of 13, one in three boys and one in five girls classify themselves as drinkers.

NCADI Publication, "Stopping Alcohol and Other Use Before it Starts"

Second and third graders learn most of their information about alcohol from television.

Weekly Reader National Survey on Drugs and Drinking, 1990

Studies suggest that children exposed to television beer ads grow up to relate beer consumption with good times and fun, rather than with caution and risk.

Coalition for the Prevention of Alcohol Problems, November 1996

In the United States today, the average age of beginning alcohol use is 12½ years old.

The National Council on Alcoholism, 1997

Name: _____

Here's a look at how alcohol can harm each part of the body.

Brain

Alcohol is a depressant. It slows down all the major functions of the central nervous system, causing slurred speech, mental confusion, blurry vision, and poor muscle control. If enough alcohol is consumed, it severely impairs the functioning of the respiratory system, and can arrest breathing. Prolonged alcohol use can cause confusion, memory loss, and brain damage.

Liver

The liver works to cleanse the body of toxins, including alcohol. Once alcohol enters the blood, the liver tries to rid the bloodstream of it. Prolonged alcohol use can cause hepatitis, cirrhosis of the liver, and liver cancer.

Stomach

The stomach also tries to remove toxins from the body—usually by vomiting. If enough alcohol is consumed, vomiting will follow. Prolonged alcohol use can inflame the lining of the stomach and cause ulcers.

Muscles

Prolonged alcohol use can cause weakness and loss of muscle tissue.

Heart

Prolonged alcohol use can cause high blood pressure, an irregular pulse rate, and an enlarged heart.

Pancreas

Prolonged alcohol use can upset digestion and cause severe pain, malnutrition, and early diabetes.

Reproductive System

Prolonged alcohol use can cause impotence in males. In females, it can increase the risk of menstrual problems and it can severely damage the fetus of a pregnant woman.

Name: _____

Here's what you should know about drinking alcohol during pregnancy:

- When a pregnant woman drinks any alcoholic beverage—such as beer, wine, wine coolers, liquor and mixed drinks—the alcohol passes swiftly through the placenta to her fetus.
- The baby's immature organs break down the alcohol much more slowly than an adult's body would. As a result, the alcohol level of the fetus's blood can be even higher than that of the mother's blood and can remain elevated longer.
- Alcohol may harm the unborn baby's developing organs, and can cause permanent physical and mental damage to the fetus.
- Each year approximately 5,000 babies—one in every 750—are born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), a combination of physical and mental birth defects.
- Almost 50,000 babies are born each year with Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE), a condition characterized by some, but not all, of the birth defects associated with FAS.
- Among the known causes of mental retardation, FAS is one of the most common and is the only cause that is entirely preventable.
- Babies with FAS are abnormally small at birth and usually do not catch up as they get older.
- Most babies with FAS have small eyes, a short upturned nose and flat cheeks.
- The organs of babies with FAS may not form properly—especially the heart and brain.
- Many have poor coordination, a short attention span, and behavioral problems.
- The effects of FAS last a lifetime. Even if they are not mentally retarded, adults with FAS can have severe psychological and behavioral problems.

No one knows how much alcohol will put a fetus at risk for FAS or FAE. For this reason, pregnant women should not drink alcohol at all.

Name: _____

Alcohol poisoning is a severe elevation of blood alcohol concentration (BAC) that often results from consuming large amounts of alcohol. A person is at great risk of alcohol poisoning if he/she:

- Drinks excessively (four or more drinks in one sitting)
- Drinks after using medication or other drugs
- Does not respond to being talked to or shouted at
- Does not respond when being pinched or prodded
- Vomits while sleeping or passed out
- Cannot stand up or remain standing unless aided by others
- Won't wake up despite repeated attempts
- Has slow breathing (fewer than six breaths per minute)
- Has bluish or purplish skin, or skin that appears flushed
- Has clammy skin or skin that feels cool to the touch
- Has an irregular pulse rate or a pulse slower than 40 beats per minute
- Has an irregular heart rhythm, with the heart beating unusually slowly or quickly

If you see these signs:

- Don't leave the person alone!
- Call 911 for medical assistance immediately.
- Place the person on his/her side to reduce the risk of choking on vomit.
- If the person's breathing becomes slower than six breathes per minute, perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation immediately!
- If you are no longer able to feel a pulse, or if the person's pulse goes below 40 beats per minute, perform CPR until medical assistance arrives.
- Explain what you know about what the person has ingested.

Name: _____

Though some people are able to recover from alcoholism without assistance, most need some form of help. Once a person admits to a problem with alcohol, there are three vital steps that can help them stop drinking and rebuild their lives:

1.

Commit to quitting. This decision must be strong, complete and without negotiations such as “I will only drink sometimes.”

2.

Get help from a doctor. Alcoholism is a physical problem that can improve with treatment.

3.

Get support. Check the organizations below. They will provide tools, support, referrals and information. Ask family and friends for support too.

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
1-800-662-HELP

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
Check your local phone book under “Alcoholism” or call 212-870-3400.

Al-Anon (for friends and family members in an alcoholic person’s life)
Alateen (for children of alcoholics)
1-800-344-2666 (United States) or 1-800-443-4525 (Canada)

Alcoholism Treatment HelpLine
1-800-527-5344

National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence
800-475-HOPE
www.ncadd.org

www.addictionresourceguide.com
An online directory of addiction treatment facilities

Name: _____

Although there are no guaranteed ways to help someone who is abusing alcohol or other drugs, there are certain strategies that you can attempt. Remember, a person abusing drugs or alcohol will usually deny that there is a problem or feel attacked when you try to discuss it. Don't try to confront the user by yourself. The best thing is to enlist the help of a teacher or an adult family member.

DO:

Pick a good time to talk: arguing with the user when he or she is impaired or high is pointless and unproductive.

Be supportive: volunteer to help the user find treatment, and to be there for the hard times ahead.

Be firm: explain why you feel the user has a substance abuse problem that must be faced.

Educate yourself: let the user know you're learning about alcohol.

Show understanding: listen to the reasons why the user abuses alcohol.

Look at your own role: have you set a fair example? Did you act as an enabler? Should you pay more attention to your own needs?

DON'T:

Become a jailer: no amount of threats, lectures or punishments will stop the user from his or her behavior.

Be a martyr: taking on someone else's responsibilities will leave the user feeling worthless.

Accuse the user: sarcastic or emotional appeals will only make the user feel guilty.

Protect the user: covering up or making excuses for the user's actions is called "enabling."

Copy the user: drinking or using drugs along with the user will not fix anything.

Blame yourself: we can only take responsibility for our own behavior. You cannot make someone else into a drug abuser.

Name: _____

www.ncadd.org

National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Addiction

www.niaaa.nih.gov

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism

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Hyde, Margaret. Alcohol 101: An Overview for Teens. Twenty First Century Books, 1999.

Mitchell, Hayley R. Teen Alcoholism. Lucent Books, 1997.

O'Brien, Robert and Sidney O'Brien. Encyclopedia of Drug Abuse. New York: Facts on File, 1992.

Rosengren, John. Life is Just a Party: Portrait of a Teenage Partier. New York: Deaconess Press, 1990.

Seixas, Judith. Children of Alcoholism: A Survivor's Manual. New York: Crown Books, 1987.

Shuker, Nancy. Everything You Need to Know about an Alcoholic Parent. New York: Rosen Group, 1989.

Torr, James D. ed. Teens and Alcohol (Current Controversies). Greenhaven Press, 2001.

Walker, Bonnie. Drugs and Alcohol Workbook. Holmes Beach, FL: Learning Publications, 1990.

Other Alcohol Education Products from Human Relations Media

<i>Underage Drinking: Know the Facts, Know the Risks</i>	video/print or DVD/print
<i>Confronting Drunk Driving</i>	video/print or DVD/print
<i>Targeted! How Tobacco & Alcohol Companies Try to Get You Hooked</i>	video/print or DVD/print
<i>Dying High: Teens in the ER</i>	video/print or DVD/print
<i>Brain Scans: Alcohol and the Teenage Brain</i>	video/print or DVD/print
<i>Getting Stupid: How Drugs Damage Your Brain</i>	video/print or DVD/print
<i>Everything You Ever Needed to Know about Drugs in 23 Minutes</i>	video/print
<i>Alcohol and Sex: Prescription for Poor Decision-Making</i>	video/print
<i>Bombed!</i>	video/print
<i>The Keg Party</i>	video/print
<i>Living a Lie: The Alcoholic Family</i>	video/print
<i>Curriculum in a Box: Substance Abuse 2003</i>	video/print curriculum
<i>Dangers of Binge Drinking</i>	folding display or overhead transparency pack
<i>Dangers of Alcohol</i>	overhead transparency pack
<i>Teenagers and Alcohol</i>	folding display

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