



According to the CDC, 70,237 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States in 2017. Of those deaths, almost 68% involved a prescription or illicit opioid.  
[www.LiveDrugFree.org](http://www.LiveDrugFree.org)

# DrugFree@WorkPlace

## Alcohol Abuse by Young Workers

Many young people do not drink alcohol at risky levels. However, if the company you work for employs young adults (aged 18 to 24 years), you should be aware that this is the age group that is most likely to experience alcohol-related harm.

It is generally accepted that because young people are more likely to drink a large amount of alcohol in a short period of time (binge drinking), they are more likely to experience the dangers associated with alcohol abuse. These include violent behavior, accidental injuries resulting in death, and driving under the influence of alcohol.

In fact, while 18- to 24-year-olds make up only 13% of licensed drivers in the American workplace, they account for 27% of accidents, and more young people die from automobile crashes than any other cause.

When young people are employed, they have the same responsibilities as other workers to work safely and not pose a risk of harm to themselves or others. With the support of training and supervision provided by your company's drug and alcohol-free workplace program, young people at your workplace should be able to understand and accept these responsibilities.

Numerous drug free workplace studies involving young workers have found that those who reported that alcohol was available at work reported higher drinking rates. Those who reported the existence of an alcohol policy at work, however, reported less frequent alcohol use than those who reported that there was not an alcohol policy. Young workers employed at workplaces that did not have an alcohol policy also reported significantly higher levels of alcohol availability. The most effective way to prevent alcohol-related problems at work is to develop, implement, and enforce a workplace alcohol policy.

Often young workers lack experience, and may be very susceptible to adopting prevalent workplace cultures. If there is a workplace culture that tolerates, promotes, or accepts drinking alcohol, this can put young workers at particular risk because they may

feel they also need to drink alcohol in order to be accepted or to "fit in."

Managers, supervisors, and coworkers have a responsibility to our youth to set a good example and to ensure that young people are not subjected to workplace bullying, initiation ceremonies, or practical jokes involving the use of alcohol that may result in injury or harm to them. As responsible adults, we all have a duty of care to eliminate or reduce any potential risk of injury or harm to young workers arising from such behavior.

## Help Prevent Underage Drinking

Many parents and employers of young people express concern about underage drinking and voice support for public policies to curb it. Yet surveys show that youth often obtain alcohol from adults. Studies also show that many parents underestimate the extent of the problem and their own children's alcohol consumption habits.

The facts are that young adults have the highest alcohol consumption rates in the U.S., and are the age group at highest risk of alcohol-related injury—including road trauma, violence, unwanted sexual activity, falls, overdose related to a low tolerance to alcohol, accidental death (including drowning), and suicide.

Young people also experience many of the immediate effects of alcohol more strongly than adults, and there is evidence that the earlier that a young person starts to drink, the greater the risk of alcohol-related problems in later life.

Here are some ways that parents can make sure kids remain alcohol-free:

- Explain clearly that drinking under the age of 21 has both legal and real-life consequences—along with a potential loss of control and judgment—and health, social, and safety risks. For teens, it may also be a good idea to stress that there may be additional consequences—which can include removal from a sports team, a permanent criminal record impacting scholastic and professional pursuits, and/or serious injury to

themselves or friends. Even if they do not drink, warn them of the potential consequences of getting into a car with someone who has been drinking.

- Role play with your kids about how to get themselves out of dangerous situations—such as being confronted with alcohol at a party, or when a friend who has been drinking wants to drive.
- Keep an eye out for any symptoms of alcohol abuse such as withdrawal from family and friends, dropping grades, or missing money.
- If you consume alcohol, set an example for your children by doing so responsibly and pledging not to provide alcohol to youth.

***The following information is provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities.***

**“It is not good for man to be alone.”**

Did you know that suicide rates have been lower on Super Bowl Sundays than other Sundays?<sup>1</sup>

**Isolation** is a big risk factor for suicide. Its opposite, **connectedness**, is a protective factor. It is important for our mental wellness to be connected to other people, to family, to community, and to social institutions. With the current social distancing requirements due to the pandemic this has become more difficult.

A recent research study looked at patterns in rural counties in America that had increased suicide rates. Two key issues were “high social fragmentation” (which included the number of single-person households, unmarried residents, and residents moving frequently) and “low social capital” (few opportunities to engage with organizations and community programs). No surprise—the study found “that greater opportunities for social engagement and connection...are associated with lower suicide rates.”<sup>2</sup>

Certain middle-aged and older men are at higher risk for suicide than other groups. Why? Psychologist Thomas Joiner suggests one possible reason: “...it is the tendency of this group in particular not to replenish their social connectedness as they age. U.S. men in general, and white men in particular, seem to form some close friendships in childhood and early to late adolescence, but the forming of new and deep friendships in adulthood is relatively rare.”<sup>3</sup> Thomas Joiner also argues that two of the main reasons why people start to think about suicide are not feeling a sense of belonging, as well as feeling like a burden to others.

So what about you? Or your neighbor, coworker, friend, relative, or loved one? If you are feeling the pressures of isolation, or you are aware of others who are struggling with isolation—reach out electronically! You can use social media and phone calls to encourage others in these difficult times. Making and maintaining these kinds of connections may save a life.

<sup>1</sup>Joiner, Thomas & Hollar, Daniel & Orden, Kimberly. (2006). On Buckeyes, Gators, Super Bowl Sunday, and the Miracle on Ice: “Pulling Together” is Associated With Lower Suicide Rates. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology—J SOC CLIN PSYCHOL.* 25. 179-195. 10.1521/jscp.2006.25.2.179.

<sup>2</sup>Steelesmith DL, Fontanella CA, Campo JV, Bridge JA, Warren KL, Root ED. Contextual Factors Associated With County-Level Suicide Rates in the United States, 1999 to 2016. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2019; 2(9): e1910936. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.10936

<sup>3</sup>Joiner, T. (2005). *Why people die by suicide.* Harvard University Press.

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at:  
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact Suicide Prevention Director, Walker Tisdale, at:  
[walker.tisdale@dbhdd.ga.gov](mailto:walker.tisdale@dbhdd.ga.gov).

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:**  
1-800-273-TALK (8255).