

Choose Booze or Not

Next time you see a teenager sitting around with a soda can, especially at night, ask him or her if you can have a sip. If they offer you the can, you don't have to drink. If they don't, there's a good chance the beverage inside isn't Dr. Pepper.

Drinking is cool again in America's high schools—way cool.

My father broke his back working in order to send me to Chaminade High School on Long Island. This is a college preparatory school with a strict code of behavior. My dad knew that if I got through that place, there would be a chance I would not wind up in Sing-Sing, a situation my grammar school teachers had predicted.

While Chaminade taught “values” and a Christian philosophy on life, off campus many students were wild men. Back then, the drinking age was 18 and most seniors could legally buy all the booze they wanted. And many did, leading to the usual chaos.

Now, the drinking age in America is 21, if the state wants federal highway funds. But, according to my high school teacher friends, student drinking is worse than it ever was. It's so bad that Chaminade and other private schools have cancelled proms this year, citing after-prom parties where many kids drink themselves sick.

The principal at Chaminade, Father James Williams, places much of the blame on parents. And remember, these parents aren't struggling in the inner city to put food on the table—these are affluent parents who believe kids will be kids, so why not let them get wasted once in a while?

This attitude is more common than you might think in America. The primary rationalization is, you can die for your country in Iraq or Afghanistan, but you can't drink? Come on.

Okay, fine, it is tough to tell an 18-year old that his Bud's not for him. But let's be realistic. Intoxication can lead to many things, and not many of them are good. Drunk adults often get away with the overindulgence, but the risk goes through the roof with kids.

Most guidance counselors will tell you that many pregnancies occur when teenagers are drunk. STD's are also easily passed along when teens are too out of it to use protection. Fights break out, destructive traffic accidents are common, and so is destruction of property.

If a teenager is drunk and unsupervised—look out.

Often, parents have an unrealistic view of their offspring. How many moms and dads that you know will say, "Yeah, I know Jack's a lush, but hey, I'm not committed enough to control him." How many times have you ever heard THAT?

No, the usual dance is for parents to say they have "good kids," and to slough off substance abuse with a shrug. After all, many baby boomer parents routinely got blasted in their youth.

That kind of thinking is foolish, and if you don't believe me, have a medium set you up with Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. Substance abuse was dopey then, and it's dopey now. Just because you survived it doesn't mean your daughter will.

So the best plan is to lay out the pros and cons of getting loaded. Discuss the good things about it with your kids, and the bad things about it. Use some visuals to make points. Baby pictures, hospital rooms, wrecked cars, that kind of thing.

Then keep track of your kid. As long as he or she is getting laundry done in the house, you have a right to do that.

In short, do everything you can to discourage the intoxication

deal. In that way, if you fail, at least you know you tried.