

# *Need to Know*

**IF NOT FOR YOU — FOR A FRIEND**

Protecting yourself is often about having the correct information. What you need to know about alcohol is there is a reason the legal age for alcohol use is 21. Your brain is still under construction and responds differently when exposed to substances. For starters, the first area of the brain impacted by use (the frontal lobe) is also a late-maturing center for reasoning and decision-making. Additionally, your processing speeds are slower.

## **Here is what that means**

- Teens are more likely to make poor decisions under the influence of alcohol. These decisions can carry consequences that last a lifetime.
- The same amount of alcohol that causes sedation in an adult can damage the brain of a teen.
- Alcohol use during the teen years can result in lower scores on vocabulary and memory tests as well as visual and spatial tests.
- Alcohol use disturbs sleep cycles, which again affects learning and memory, and can lead to problems with regulating emotions.
- Over 1/3 of teen traffic deaths are alcohol related.
- Frequent heavy use of alcohol has been associated with low self-esteem, depression, conduct disorders, anti-social behavior and anxiety in adolescents.

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## **Things to remember:**

- Illinois has a “Zero-Tolerance” law. This means underage drivers (less than 21) with even a trace of alcohol on their breath will lose their license.
- A teen’s brain is primed for learning. Unfortunately, addiction is learned. This is why 90% of addictions have roots in the teen years. It can take only a few months for a teen to develop a full-blown addiction.
- Planning ahead is always a good idea. If you know there is a party or event coming up that might present some risks, think through how to either avoid the situation or get yourself out of it. Keep in mind, one poor decision does not need to lead to a second or third. Never hesitate to call a parent or other support person to pick you up.

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