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# Parenting for Prevention

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Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, November, 2009

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## New Challenges to Keep Teens Safe



Homecoming celebrations are over but the holidays are quickly approaching. Ellen Morehouse, the Executive Director of SAS says "Parents are challenged to keep their youth safe while new ways are found to market alcohol, like on Facebook. This issue of *Parenting for Prevention* identifies some of these challenges and provides advice for parents."

She goes on to say, "with all the exposure to ads and promotions for alcohol, the parents role in prevention is critical. Parents can try to 'inoculate' youth by 'talking back' to TV ads for products that make unrealistic or false claims. Critically analyzing billboards during car rides and signs at sports events can help young people learn to 'see through' advertising and become less vulnerable to alcohol promotions. The lessons can also apply to prescription and over-the-counter medications, supplements and other products such as energy drinks."

Another positive thing that parents can do to protect their children is download, discuss, and sign the Contract For Life included in this issue. It could save a life.

**Patricia Murphy Warble, MSW, CPP**

## Alcohol Advertising To Underage Youth

*Underage Facebook Members Exposed to Alcohol Ads*

*The following article was written by Bob Curley and originally appeared on the Join Together website.*

The Marin Institute is calling on Facebook to stop accepting paid ads for alcoholic beverages and to ban alcohol-related pages, applications and events, citing a study that found that alcohol-related content is reaching underage Facebook users despite company policies designed to prevent such marketing.

Depiction of alcohol and other drug use by minors on Facebook pages has long been a concern of preventionists, school officials and parents. But the latest controversy springs from Facebook's recent moves to monetize the site, founded in 2004 and currently the world's largest social-networking site with 300 million members.

Originally intended for use by college students, Facebook now counts among its membership everyone from preteens to retirees. An estimated one-third of the site's members are under the legal drinking age. Marin Institute researcher Sarah Mart, author of the "Alcohol Promotion and Facebook" report, takes a dim view of the changes.

"Facebook started as a fun tool for college students to interact and connect, but it has morphed into yet another means for corporations to exploit its users, particularly youth," she said. "As Facebook continues to grow as the youth market's social-networking tool of choice, the alcohol industry's influence on Facebook must not be underestimated."

A Facebook spokesperson told Join Together that the company "take [s] the issue of underage drinking seriously and believes the standards we have set in this area lead the Internet and media industries."

"Specifically, we require that all alcohol-related advertisements use our tools and demographic targeting options to restrict the ad to users who are over the legal drinking age," the Facebook spokesperson said. "We strictly enforce this policy through proactive investigations and response to user reports. We also require developers to restrict access to alcohol-focused applications, and respond to all reports of breaches in this policy."

The Marin report, however, contends that Facebook's Alcohol Advertising Guidelines which resemble the alcohol industry's own voluntary advertising guidelines - go largely unenforced, and that underage members are among those exposed to paid alcohol ads and promotional content -- some of which promotes dangerous drinking, the report says. Facebook also does not place age restrictions on alcohol-related events or groups, so under-21 users are able to access many of these features, the report noted.

"The only way to protect youth and young adults from the incessant promotion of alcohol on Facebook is to remove all promotional content about alcohol," said report co-author Jacob Mergendoller, a student at Wesleyan University. Marin called on Facebook to hire external monitors to enforce its rules on alcohol-related content, as well.

Marin researchers created a Facebook profile for an underage user and another for a 21-plus user, then used both to test the accessibility of alcohol-related content. The fictitious profile included interests and activities -- such as "alcohol" and "bars" -- designed to attract alcohol companies, who gain access to such data when they advertise on Facebook. They found that pages for brands like Captain Morgan, Jack Daniels, Bacardi, Bacardi Breezer, Heineken, and Mike's Hard Lemonade were accessible to the under-21 user, as was an application called "Shots!" that allowed users to send virtual shots of alcohol to their Facebook friends.

Another application called "Beer Mail," which encouraged users to "share some beer with your friends and get them drunk," also could be used by the under-21 member, the Marin report said. Facebook events featuring alcohol were ubiquitous, researchers found, and the under-21 user could access events like "Smirnoff Saturdays" at a North Carolina bar and the "Captain Morgan Welcome Back Tour of Gainesville," which targeted students at the University of Florida at Gainesville.

Overall, searches conducted by Marin researchers yielded 93 pages with more than 1.1 million fans for the top-selling beer brands, 2,200 events for the top five beer brands and another 2,200 for the top liquor brands, and 58,000 groups related to the search term "alcohol."

"Facebook's policies regarding alcohol ads and alcohol-related content in pages, applications, events, and groups do not effectively protect its users from exposure," the report concluded. "Facebook does not appear to monitor or ensure compliance with its own alcohol advertising rules, despite Facebook's claim that it reserves the right to reject or remove advertising that it deems contrary to its advertising philosophy."

Many of the alcohol-related pages are created by individual Facebook users, not alcohol companies or sellers, Marin acknowledged. However, Mart (the researcher) and colleagues

noted that alcohol companies are attracted to the viral-marketing opportunities available to them through Facebook pages, applications, events and groups.

"At the same time that Facebook must address the inadequacies of its policies, the alcohol industry must also question its affiliation with Facebook as a marketing tool when content so blatantly violates many of the industry's own advertising guidelines," the report said. "Pages, applications, events, and groups all contained numerous posts about harmful behaviors associated with specific brand names of a variety of beer and spirits, many accessible to users of all ages."

Without conceding fault, Facebook officials struck a conciliatory tone in response to the Marin report. "We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Marin Institute to challenge others to meet the standards we've set," a spokesperson for Facebook said. "We plan to reach out to the Marin Institute in hopes that their research may have revealed violations in our policies and to open a dialogue around industry wide standards."

### **Contract For Life**

This Contract, which is printed on the next page, is designed to encourage communication between young people and their parents about potentially destructive risky behaviors. Please consider downloading this contract and have a discussion with your teen and sign it together.

# CONTRACT FOR LIFE

## A Foundation for Trust and Caring

*This Contract is designed to facilitate communication between young people and their parents about potentially destructive decisions related to alcohol, drugs, peer pressure, and behavior. The issues facing young people today are often too difficult for them to address alone. SADD believes that effective parent-child communication is critically important in helping young adults to make healthy decisions.*

## YOUNG PERSON

I recognize that there are many potentially destructive decisions I face every day and commit to you that I will do everything in my power to avoid making decisions that will jeopardize my health, my safety and overall well-being, or your trust in me. I understand the dangers associated with the use of alcohol and drugs and the destructive behaviors often associated with impairment.

By signing below, I pledge my best effort to remain free from alcohol and drugs; I agree that I will never drive under the influence; I agree that I will never ride with an impaired driver; and I agree that I will always wear a seat belt.

Finally, I agree to call you if I am ever in a situation that threatens my safety and to communicate with you regularly about issues of importance to both of us.

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YOUNG PERSON

## PARENT (or Caring Adult)

I am committed to you and to your health and safety. By signing below, I pledge to do everything in my power to understand and communicate with you about the many difficult and potentially destructive decisions you face.

Further, I agree to provide for you safe, sober transportation home if you are ever in a situation that threatens your safety and to defer discussions about that situation until a time when we can both have a discussion in a calm and caring manner.

I also pledge to you that I will not drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs, I will Always seek safe, sober transportation home, and I will always wear a seat belt.

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PARENT/CAREGIVER



### Students Against Destructive Decisions

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**Starting Alcohol Young May  
Lead to Adult Dependency  
Latest Research Finds**

A study done at Washington University School of Medicine found brain changes caused by drinking before age 15 could predispose adolescents to a lifetime of alcohol dependency. The research will be published in the December, 2009 issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*.

The researchers studied alcohol use in twins and found that early drinking may induce changes in the highly sensitive adolescent brain, which may also modify an individual's subsequent genetic vulnerability to addiction. These findings show that young people should be discouraged from using alcohol when they are young because such behavior could trigger an onset of alcohol abuse.

The study also found that the age of first alcohol use correlated with a higher number of alcohol dependency symptoms. Those who started drinking later in life were less likely to be dependent, the study found.

**New Study Indicates that More  
Alcohol Ads Air When Children  
are Watching**

A study conducted by UCLA and the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY), published in the October, 2009 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health (AJPH)* concludes that the most popular cable TV shows watched by children seem to have the most alcohol advertising. The study found that alcohol ads aired on cable between 2001 and 2006 on shows with the highest percentage of viewers ages 12 to 20 had the largest number of alcohol ads. They found that the ads for beer, liquor and alcopops increased in relation to the youth audience percentage, but wine ads dwindled. CAMY director, David Jernigan says "This research suggests that ads are aimed at groups that include a disproportionate number of teens and that the alcohol industry's voluntary self-monitoring is not working to reduce adolescent exposure to ads." The article can be found at

**Upcoming Events**

**November 10 6:15pm**

Katonah-Lewisboro Family U  
John Jay Middle School  
Keynotes:  
Contact: 234-3227

**November 17 7:30pm**

Blind Brook High School  
*Teens, Parents, Alcohol, Drugs, Health  
and the Law*  
Contact: 937-3600, X3144

**November 18 7:30pm**

Croton HS  
*Teens, Parents, Alcohol, Drugs, Health  
and the Law*  
Contact: 271-3285

**November 19 6:00pm**

Bedford Central Family U  
Fox Lane Middle School  
Workshops:  
*Strategies for Academic Success*  
Mike Nerney  
Contact: 234-3227

**November 21 7:45am**

Pelham High School Cafeteria C  
Fathers' Forum in Pelham  
*Going Beyond the Man of Steel: Strong  
Dads in the 21st Century*  
Contact: 738-0482

**In preparing for Thanksgiving guests, do not forget to  
clean out your medicine cabinet and dispose of unused medicine. Medicines  
currently being used should be hidden from guests that have**