**Parenting Styles and Underage Drinking**

Drinking alcohol undoubtedly is a part of American culture, as are conversations between parents and children about its risks and potential benefits. However, information about alcohol can seem contradictory. Alcohol affects people differently at different stages of life—small amounts may have health benefits for certain adults, but for children and adolescents, alcohol can interfere with normal brain development. Alcohol’s differing effects and a parents’ changing role in their children’s lives as they mature and seek greater independence can make talking about alcohol a challenge. Parents may have trouble setting concrete family policies for alcohol use. And they may find it difficult to communicate with children and adolescents about alcohol-related issues.

Research shows, however, that teens and young adults do believe their parents should have a say in whether they drink alcohol. Parenting styles are important—teens raised with a combination of encouragement, warmth, and appropriate discipline are more likely to respect their parents’ boundaries. Understanding parental influence on children through conscious and unconscious efforts, as well as when and how to talk with children about alcohol, can help parents have more influence than they might think on a child’s alcohol use. Parents can play an important role in helping their children develop healthy attitudes toward drinking while minimizing its risk.

Accumulating evidence suggests that alcohol use—and in particular binge drinking—may have negative effects on adolescent development and increase the risk for alcohol dependence later in life. This underscores the need for parents to prevent or help delay the onset of drinking as long as possible. Parenting styles may influence whether their children follow their advice regarding alcohol use. Every parent is unique, but the ways in which each parent interacts with his or her children can be broadly categorized into four styles:

* **Authoritarian parents** typically exert high control and discipline with low warmth and responsiveness. For example, they respond to bad grades with punishment but let good grades go unnoticed.
* **Permissive parents** typically exert low control and discipline with high warmth and responsiveness. For example, they deem any grades at all acceptable and fail to correct behavior that may lead to bad grades.
* **Neglectful parents** exert low control and discipline as well as low warmth and responsiveness. For example, they show no interest at all in a child’s school performance.
* **Authoritative parents** exert high control and discipline along with high warmth and responsiveness. For example, they offer praise for good grades and use thoughtful discipline and guidance to help improve low grades.

Regardless of the developmental outcome examined—body image, academic success, or substance abuse—children raised by authoritative parents tend to fare better than their peers. This is certainly true when it comes to the issue of underage drinking, in part because children raised by such parents learn approaches to problem solving and emotional expression that help protect against the psychological dysfunction that often precedes alcohol misuse. The combination of discipline and support by authoritative parents promotes healthy decision-making about alcohol and other potential threats to healthy development.   (Source: NIAAA)