

NEIGHBORS

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The Herald

MIAMI-DADE BINGE DRINKING IS RUSSIAN ROULETTE

As a local professional in the field of adolescent addictions, I would like to respond to Ana Veciana-Suarez's timely article *Before college, teach kids to resist pressure to binge* (Tropical Life, Sept. 25).

Indeed, our parents are playing a deadly game of Russian roulette. According to The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, alcohol is far and away the top drug of abuse for American kids.

Listen parents: the drug of choice for your teenager is not the drug ecstasy, nor is it other hard drugs such as cocaine.

His or her drug of choice may be as close as your kitchen fridge: a six-pack of beer.

The Columbia research observed that teens have easy access to alcohol because parents are too often unwitting co-conspirators who see underage drinking as a rite of passage rather than a deadly round of Russian roulette.

Veciana-Suarez was right on the money when she wrote: "courage to resist peer pressure is a personal choice, one fostered in a child's early years and nurtured through adolescence. It is one that needs constant care from parents."

Parents must play a crucial role in the domestic war against alcohol abuse.

Educational efforts are commendable, but in spite of the wide programs to reach out to students, binge drinking among the college population continues to be a concern.

Efforts must go further and engage students in a more meaningful and therapeutic way.

Yes, greater attention should be paid to factors that

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impact the environment around students, but "being drunk will have to lose its glamour" before any positive results can be found.

Finally, binge drinking is not just a college problem. Sadly, it is a growing concern in high school-aged children locally and throughout our nation, in part, due to parental permissiveness toward underage drinking: parents are definitely playing a deadly game of Russian roulette.

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Soapbox is a Miami Herald

column aimed at letting people vent. A few rules: We will not publish personal attacks. Your rants must address a specific LOCAL problem and be less than 350 words.

We also reserve the right to edit for length and also to exclude any comments that may be libelous.

We won't print anonymous letters, so please sign them and include the city or neighborhood where you live and a contact number.

Ready to rant? You can do it in English or Spanish. E-mail mlynch@herald.com or write Soapbox, 7300 N. Kendall Dr., Suite 200, Miami, FL 33156.