

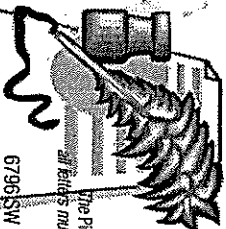
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The Pinecrest Tribune welcomes letters to the editor. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and all letters must be signed. Please include your complete address and phone number. Send letters to:

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Letters to the Editor

Underage drinking 'a deadly round of Russian roulette'

Dear Editor:

In response to the article entitled *Warning issued to adults who allow minors to drink* (Pinecrest Tribune May 19-June 1), my support to Sina Miska, Palmetho's PTSA president, for continuing to bring to parents crucial information about teen drinking and the consequences that come with it. I strongly suggest the continuation of community meetings such as these for I am frequently surprised by the lack of knowledge (or denial) exhibited by parents. As the article mentioned, sadly there were far too many empty seats in the audience.

The reality is that underage drinking (young people age 12-20) accounts for 20 percent of all alcohol consumed in the U.S. (or \$22.5 billion), according to a revised report recently released by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA). CASA president, Joseph Califano warns, "Underage drinking has reached epidemic proportions in America."

The report also found that 5 million high schoolers (31 percent) say they binge drink at least once a month, with the gender gap disappearing: both male and female ninth graders are just as likely to drink. Alcohol is the top drug of abuse for American kids. Other statistics revealed in the study show that individuals who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcoholics, and lifetime alcohol abuse is greatest for those who start at age 14.

Apart from the referenced disturbing statistics, what is most disconcerting (as an addiction specialist dealing primarily with the adolescent population) is what the CASA researchers have confirmed: 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.

Sincerely,

Marino E. Carbonell, Ed.D.
Psychotherapist/Certified Addiction Specialist