



## Drinking: the dividing factor in team chemistry that's never discussed.

As a parent, coach and former high school and collegiate athlete, underage drinking reared its ugly head in every facet of my athletic and coaching career.

No one really talked about it because it was completely accepted among parents and teens. Except mine. I was the athlete who everyone avoided talking to about parties. My good friends, my teammates and other parents avoided our family at all cost during those nights.

Fast forward to my coaching life and it was a huge problem then as well. It was joked about, until it wasn't funny. Throughout my husbands coaching career (and teaching) and mine we have buried 20 students in about 25 years. Most of them were alcohol related in some way. That's an insane statistic.

I have counseled girls through sexually decisions or assault that occurred at these parties or pictures that were taken of them without consent. It's a dicey game to play, I guess.

As a parent, my kids grew up into high school athletes with their father as their head soccer coach. They were blocked on social media on certain nights, left out of many invites and intentionally mocked. My husband and I were not free and clear either. Parents allowed and participated in these parties and then smiled and said hi on game day. We knew most always because kids couldn't keep it off social media. No one wants to be the NARC so round and round it goes. Some kids get away with it, some kids die.

It's considered impossible by most to raise teens in a culture where drinking is wildly accepted and encouraged. That's what the enemy would have you believe.

I don't regret our decisions to be a barrier for our kids, for our athletes and for our families. It causes division most don't even know about until your coaching it. So, for now, if you are walking into these waters, you are not alone. I encourage you to fight this fight.



## A guide to navigate underage drinking your young athlete

### 1. Do not freak out, but do not take it lightly.

- Junior/high school is the beginning of most alcohol-induced parties.
- Don't freak out, but take it seriously. Have early conversations with your athlete.
- Set your expectations early and pray for courage. It will be just as hard for you as a parent as it will be for your athlete.

### 2. Be very direct with what happens at underage parties.

- Older boys' hormones rage and will look to take advantage of intoxicated (younger) girls
- Teen bodies do not know their alcohol limit.
- Hormones increase in girls as well as boys, and often lead to sexual decisions they would not otherwise make.
- Most teens feel they can still drive home despite alcohol consumption.
- Be VERY clear if they find themselves at a drinking party that you would prefer that they call for help than end up in a worse situation...or dead.

### 3. Pray for discernment and protection.

- The parent who takes a stand will face scrutiny.
- We have heard every reason possible to allow kids to experience a drinking party before they come of age. So far, nothing I have seen has convinced me. We have buried too many kids during our tenure as coaches and teachers. I have counseled too many survivors of sexual assault for anyone to ever convince me it's a wise choice to allow.
- Take your concerns to the coach (if you have that kind of relationship. This will take prayer, especially depending on the convictions of your child's coach.

### 4. Be courageous and do not compromise.

Taking a stand against underage drinking will cause division, but it can also open the door to sharing Jesus. We can't expect non-Christians to care much about what Jesus has for our daughters, but we can lovingly show up. So, take your stand, but don't be a jerk...this will be harder than you think!





## A guide to navigate underage drinking your young athlete (continued)

### 5. Don't be a jerk.

Taking a stand against underage drinking will cause division, but it can also open the door to sharing Jesus. We can't expect non-Christians to care much about what Jesus has for our daughters, but we can lovingly show up. So, take your stand, but don't be a jerk...this will be harder than you think!

### 6. The "DD"

Your young athlete is not responsible for the safety of her underage drinking friends. The common argument for attending these parties is that your daughter will remain sober to make sure her friends are ok. This is not a weight she is meant to shoulder. Parents and guardians exist for a reason. Though I appreciate the heart behind it, this does not apply to all areas of life in any reality. This is never a good enough reason to go. (PS - many sports contracts word their contracts "drinking or in the presence of underage drinking"...just being in attendance is a guilty verdict for most athletic programs!)

### 6. The Other Stuff...

#### -Social Media

Talk to your athlete about showing up to these parties in the age of social media, where EVERYTHING is documented. Most school teams will remove athletes if they are caught at underage drinking parties...is it worth the risk?

#### -FOMO

If your athlete is truly feeling left out, acknowledge that. Don't dismiss the need for peer-to-peer friendships, and the insane amount of peer pressure they may be under to go. Acknowledge how hard it is to be left out, or to choose to be left out.

#### -Future Self

This will be a fundamental learning curve in living counter-culturally as a Christian.

This will be hard for you as the parent, and for your daughter, but living for Jesus was never going to be easy.

As He promised, it will be worth it.

*Sincerely, Amber J*