Binge drinking awareness: Tips for laying off "the sauce"

By Jeffrey C. Doepp, CFAY Public Affairs

The term binge drinking used to mean drinking heavily over several days. Now, however, the term refers to a common pattern of excessive consumption of alcohol use. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism defines binge drinking as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 grams percent or above in a short period of time.

This typically happens when men consume five or more drinks and when women consume four or more drinks in about a two-hour period and, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accounts for more than half of the 75,000 deaths due to excessive drinking in the United States each year.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most people who binge drink are not alcohol dependent. Liquor stores, bars and alcoholic beverage companies make drinking seem attractive and fun. But, what are binge drinkers drinking? Researcher Dr. Robert Brewer of the CDC examined bingers' beverage choices.

"Beer was by far the most commonly consumed beverage type among adult binge drinkers," said Brewer, whose findings were published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine. "About two thirds of the drinks consumed by binge drinkers during their most recent binge drinking episode were in the form of beer."

Although it may be easy to get caught up in a social scene with lots of peer pressure, inevitably, one of the biggest areas of peer pressure is drinking. Other reasons why people drink may include:

• Curiosity - they want to know what it's like to drink alcohol.

• They believe that it will make them feel good; not realizing it could just as easily make them sick and hung-over.

• They may look at alcohol as a way to reduce stress, even though it can end up creating more stress.

• They want to feel older or accepted by older adults.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most people who binge drink are not alcohol dependent. Liquor stores, bars and alcoholic beverage companies make drinking seem attractive and fun.

Photo by Joe Schmitt

Many people don't think about the negative side of drinking. Although they think about the possibility of getting drunk, they may not give much consideration to being hung-over or throwing up.

You may know from experience that excessive drinking can lead to difficulty concentrating, memory lapses, mood changes and other problems that affect your day-to-day life. But binge drinking carries more serious and longer-lasting risks as well.

Alcohol poisoning is the most life-threatening consequence of binge drinking. When someone drinks too much and gets alcohol poisoning, it affects the body's involuntary reflexes including breathing and the gag reflex. If the gag reflex isn't working properly, a person can choke to death on his or her vomit. If you think someone has alcohol poisoning, call for help immediately. Other signs someone may have alcohol poisoning include:

• Extreme confusion
• Inability to be awakened
• Vomiting
• Seizures
• Slow or irregular breathing
• Low body temperature
• Bluish or pale skin

Binge drinking impairs judgment, so drinkers are more likely to take risks they might not take when they're sober. They may drive drunk and injure themselves or others. But, the motor skill required to drive isn't the only skill that is impaired, though. Walking is also more difficult while intoxicated.

According to the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, roughly one third of pedestrians 16 years and older who were killed in traffic accidents were intoxicated.

People who are drunk also take other risks they might not normally take when they're sober. For example, people who have impaired judgment may have unprotected sex, putting them at greater risk of a sexually transmitted disease or unplanned pregnancy.

Studies show that people who binge-drink are more likely to be overweight and have high blood pressure by the time they are 24. Just one regular beer contains about 150 calories, which adds up if someone drinks four or five beers a night.

Binge drinkers have a harder time focusing at work or in school. Drinking disrupts sleep patterns, which can make it harder to stay awake and concentrate during the day.

Some studies have shown that people who binge-drink heavily — those who have three or more episodes of binge drinking in two weeks — have some of the symptoms of alcoholism.

If you think you or a friend have a drinking or binge-drinking problem, get help as soon as possible.

The first step in getting treatment is getting a formal assessment of the problem. This should be done in person with a trained substance abuse professional. Ask your doctor for a referral.

Sullivans School students shop at "Reindeer Lane"

By Steve Parker, The Sullivans School Public Affairs

Students at The Sullivans School went shopping recently at Reindeer Lane, which is a store opened especially for them by members of the Sullivans Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO). The PTO is an organization fueled by volunteers who raise money and organize activities for children at The Sullivans School.

Reindeer Lane was open from Nov. 28 to Dec. 2 in the multi-purpose room of the school. Children visited the store with their classes during the week and shopped and bought presents for their families.

Parents, siblings and extended family will be feeling the love this holiday season. Students were encouraged not to shop for themselves. Numerous volunteers were on hand to wrap gifts and to help the smaller children with the math required to buy presents for multiple loved ones.

Older children used estimation skills taught them by Sullivan's teachers.

Volunteers also assisted with making appropriate gift choices, asking the children, "What types of things does your mother like to do?" or "What does daddy do in his relaxing time?"

The goal was to help ensure that moms didn't get another multi-tool and dads didn't receive the scrapbooking kit. Bethany Thornton, this year's PTO president stated planning has been ongoing since July and approximately 20 volunteers worked on the program.

The PTO is innovative also. This year for the first time, the PTO is promoting its "Super Reader" program which encourages reading for all grade levels in the school. Older students can earn "Super Reader" dog tags by reading and passing tests on books in their classrooms or younger students can earn their tags by reaching other grade appropriate reading goals.

Reindeer Lane and Super Readers are just two of the enriching activities Sullivans PTO organizes during the course of the school year. The tireless group of haloed angels holds book fairs, contracts school pictures in fall and spring, promotes original student art work, sponsors fairs, operates a school store, orders classroom shirts, and funds Sullivan's Annual Multiple Intelligence Fair in the spring. Whew! Reader, be advised, This is only a partial list due to the staggering number of programs this organization administers and to improve the lives of students, teachers and parents throughout the school year. Thank you for all you do.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer with the Sullivans PTO, you may contact them at Sullivanspto@gmail.com