LESSON 3

Alcohol



Quick Write

"Avoid using drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol as alternatives to being an interesting person."

Marilyn vos Savant, American writer

Marilyn vos Savant, American writer

You have just been invited to a party this weekend. You find out that the parents are not going to be home, so there is a good chance alcohol will be available at the party. As a member of the school baseball/softball team you were required to sign a character contract stating you would not drink alcohol any time during the scheduled season. Write a brief paragraph stating refusal skills you would use to avoid the pressure to drink alcohol.

Alcohol: A Threat to Everyone

Alcohol is a drug that is produced by a chemical reaction in fruits, vegetables, and grains. Alcohol is a chemical substance that is toxic to the body. The key ingredient for every alcoholic drink is ethanol. Ethanol is a colorless liquid used in alcoholic beverages, gasoline, and cleaning solutions.

Alcohol use is widespread in American society. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 88,000 deaths are caused by excessive alcohol use each year. Close to 14 million adult Americans have physical, social, and psychological problems related to alcohol use. It causes premature death from a variety of diseases.



- alcohol: a threat to everyone
- alcoholism
- why some teens drink alcohol



Alcohol is also used in gasoline for your car.

© M.studio/Fotolia.com

It also contributes to unnecessary deaths and injuries on the roads and in the home. The economic cost of excessive alcohol consumption in 2006 was estimated at \$223.5 billion.

How the Media Influences Our View of Alcohol

Alcohol's wide availability makes it relatively easy to obtain. Alcohol use is also seen as generally acceptable in people who are over 21—even though it can be dangerous at any age. Alcoholic beverage producers use a wide range of media outlets to influence choices made about alcohol consumption. In this section, we will examine the three main media outlets used to target users.

Television

Companies that sell alcohol bombard the public with advertisements for beer, wine, liquor, and other beverages. Television commercials and magazine ads often show drinkers in beautiful outdoor settings, at fun-filled parties, or enjoying sports. Although the ads never show underage drinking, the scenarios tend to appeal to teens as much as to adults.

Usually the message accompanying an alcohol ad says nothing about the product. Unlike ads for some drugs, alcohol ads are not required to list negative side effects. Instead, the ads promote a one-sided image of drinkers as athletic, healthy, and successful. The ads give the false impression that drinking will make you more popular and attractive. If you were to believe these hidden messages, you might think that it is normal, smart, and sophisticated to drink.

Movies

Alcohol use is common in movies, even those intended for young children and teenagers. Movies tend to portray alcohol use positively most of the time, which may influence teenage use. Alcohol use in movies does not focus on just one audience as alcohol commercials do on television. Many believe this is because teenagers spend much less time watching movies than

Vocabulary



- alcohol
- ethanol
- binge drinking
- underage drinking
- blood alcohol concentration (BAC)
- intoxicated
- fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD)
- alcoholism
- recovery
- detoxification
- sobriety
- alternatives



Responsible leaders make mature choices about alcohol. Alcohol related incidents may prevent you from obtaining established goals.

they do watching television. Surveys published by the US National Library of Medicine found that the average teenager watches 20.2 hours of television each week. Teenagers in the same group spend an average of only 4.7 hours each week watching movies. It is stated in this report that more studies need to be done in this area before experts can say movies have an influence on whether young people choose to drink.

Music and Music Videos

In a survey conducted in 2010 on adolescent binge drinking published in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, researchers from Dartmouth College and the University of Pittsburgh studied how alcohol brands mentioned in music could affect young people's drinking behaviors. Binge drinking is *the consumption of several alcoholic drinks in a very short period of time*. Binge drinking is especially dangerous. Alcohol is a depressant; it slows body systems down. Binge drinking can also lead to alcohol poisoning and possibly death.

Researchers found that music is the fastest growing form of media for young people today. Young people are listening to about 2.5 hours of music each day. They are hearing approximately 14 references to drinking per song and about eight brand names of alcohol mentioned.

The researchers also surveyed 2,541 young people, ages 15 to 23, to assess what role the association of alcohol and music played in their lives. Researchers wanted to know whether participants had ever drunk a whole drink, if they had ever engaged in binge drinking, and whether they had suffered any injuries or memory loss after drinking. A surprising result from the researchers' analysis of the survey was a strong association between recalling the alcohol brands in popular music and alcohol drinking in young people. Young people who could name at least one alcohol brand in the music were at a higher risk of having a drink or even binge drinking.

Seeing Through Media Messages

Keep in mind that alcohol companies spend billions of dollars each year promoting their products. Their advertisements focus on people's activities while using these products, rather than on the products themselves. Alcohol products mentioned in music provides free advertisements for these companies.

Young people using the latest technologies are being exposed to alcohol advertising 24 hours a day, seven days a week; these technologies include cell phones and social networking sites. Advertisers of alcohol develop advertising experiences. For example, Anheuser-Busch Company, an American brewery, spends millions of dollars each year to develop and broadcast their annual Bud Bowl. Held each year at the same time as the National Football League's Super Bowl, all characters in this Super Bowl type of production are beer bottle figures. Young people are led to believe through these experiences that things such as alcohol and sports go together, and that to be popular or have fun you should consume alcohol products.



Refusing alcohol and choosing alternative activities go hand-in-hand for success in school and with friends.

Left: © vlam1/Fotolia.com; right: © micromonkey/Fotolia.com

When you see ads for alcohol, use your own judgment to evaluate them. Will an alcoholic drink really make you more attractive or more popular? Will your relationships be successful and problem-free as a result of drinking? The harsh realities of alcohol use that you will learn in this lesson are not shown by alcohol manufacturers.

Drinking and Injuries

Drinking and driving is a dangerous, and potentially deadly, combination. Drinking alcohol impairs a person's vision, reaction time, and physical coordination. Consequently, a person who has been drinking should never get behind the wheel of a car. According to the US Department of Transportation, in 2011, there were 43,668 fatal car crashes. Of these, 4,347 involved young people between the ages of 15 to 20. Thirty-two percent or approximately 1,360 of these people were found to have alcohol in their system.

Alcohol causes other kinds of unintentional injuries as well. It impairs a person's ability to ride a bicycle or skateboard. About one-third of all bicyclists and pedestrians who die in motor vehicle collisions have been drinking. Alcohol is also linked to about one-third of all drowning deaths and about half of all deaths by fire.

Alcohol use by young people has many serious consequences, the first of which is that it is illegal. Underage drinking is when anyone under the minimum legal drinking age of 21 drinks alcohol.

According to the National Institutes for Health, underage drinking risks include:

- **Death**—5,000 people under age 21 die each year from alcohol-related car crashes, homicides, suicides, alcohol poisoning, and other injuries such as falls, burns, and drowning. Almost one-half of all traffic deaths of people under age 25 involve alcohol.
- **Serious injuries**—More than 190,000 people under age 21 visited an emergency room for alcohol-related injuries in 2008 alone.
- **Impaired judgment**—Drinking can cause young people to make poor decisions, which can then result in risky behavior like drinking and driving, sexual activity, violence, or other criminal activity. Nearly a quarter of all violent crimes committed by teens involve alcohol.
- **Increased risk for physical and sexual assault**—Young people who drink are more likely to carry out or be the victim of physical or sexual violence. Research has found that between one-third and two-thirds of date rape cases among teens and college students involve alcohol.

How Alcohol Affects the Body

Alcohol is a depressant that has powerful effects on the body. In the United States, the law prohibits alcohol use by anyone under the age of 21. Adults, however, can choose whether to drink alcohol. To make responsible decisions about alcohol use, people should understand how alcohol affects the body.

Alcohol, like other depressant drugs, slows down the functions of the brain and other parts of the nervous system. It also affects the digestive and urinary systems. Excessive use of alcohol over a long period can damage almost every organ in the body. Figure 4.4 shows some of the short-term and long-term effects of alcohol consumption.

Alcohol and the Individual

The effect that alcohol has on a person is influenced by a number of factors, including:

• **Body size**—The same amount of alcohol has a greater effect on a small person than it does on a larger person.

Gender

- Men have a greater ratio of muscle to fat than women. Muscle has a large amount of blood that flows through the muscle tissue. Fat has a much smaller amount of blood. The difference this makes is that alcohol is more diluted in a man's body, due to the larger volume of blood.
- Women have a naturally higher percentage of body fat than men do. Due to this, each drink is more concentrated in a woman's blood. This results in a higher blood alcohol level for women compared to men.
- If a 140 lb male drinks two drinks in one hour, his blood alcohol level is .038. If a 140 lb female drinks two drinks in one hour, her blood alcohol level is .048.

Short-term effects occur within minutes of drinking alcohol. Long-term effects develop over time.

Mouth and Esophagus

Short-term: Tongue, gums, and throat are affected; breath smells of alcohol.

Long-term: Damage occurs to tissues of the esophagus,

resulting in possible bleeding.

Heart and Blood Vessels

Short-term: Perspiration increases and skin becomes flushed.
Long-term: High blood pressure and damage to the heart muscle is common. Blood

vessels harden and become less flexible.

Brain and Nervous System

Short-term: Speech is slurred and vision is blurred. Drinker has difficulty walking. **Long-term:** Brain cells, many of which cannot be replaced, are destroyed. Damage occurs to the nerves throughout the body, resulting in numbness in the hands and feet.

Liver

Short-term: Liver changes alcohol into water and carbon dioxide.

Long-term: Liver is damaged, possibly resulting in cirrhosis (suh-ROH-sis), which is the scarring and destruction of the liver.

Stomach and Pancreas

Short-term: Stomach acids increase, which often results in nausea and vomiting.

Long-term: Irritation occurs in the stomach lining, causing open sores called ulcers. Pancreas becomes inflamed.

FIGURE 4.4

Effects of Alcohol on the Body

- **Time frame**—A person who drinks a lot in a short period is more likely to become intoxicated. Rapid drinking overwhelms the liver's ability to break down the alcohol.
- Amount—Drinking a large quantity of alcohol causes alcohol levels in the bloodstream to rise. If the levels become too high, alcohol poisoning can occur. Figure 4.5 shows the alcohol content of some common alcoholic beverages.
- **Food**—Food in the stomach slows down the passage of alcohol into the bloodstream.
- **Medicine**—Alcohol can interfere with the effects of medicines, and medicines can intensify the effects of alcohol.

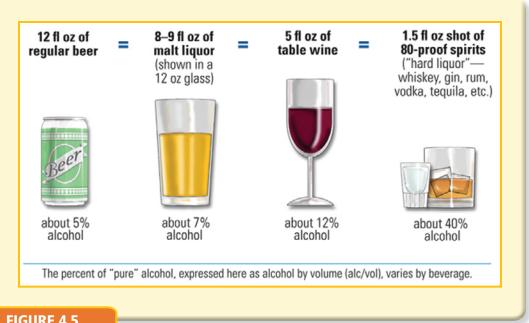


FIGURE 4.5

Alcohol Content of Common Alcoholic Drinks

Courtesy of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism/http://www.niaaa.nih.gov

Blood Alcohol Concentration

The amount of alcohol in a person's bloodstream is referred to as the blood alcohol concentration (BAC). BAC is expressed as a percentage of total blood volume. For example, if a person's BAC is 0.1 percent, then one tenth of one percent of the fluid volume of his or her blood is actually alcohol. A person's BAC depends on the amount of alcohol consumed as well as body size and the other factors discussed earlier.

A person with a BAC of 0.1 percent—or in most states, 0.08 percent—is considered legally intoxicated, or physically and mentally impaired by the use of alcohol. Driving while intoxicated can result in a jail term and, in some states, loss of driver's license. For anyone under 21, a BAC above 0 percent is illegal. If a young person is found guilty in a court of law for underage drinking, most states will now suspend all driving privileges until the age of 21. This does not include all the court costs and fines you will also have to pay.

Alcohol's Effects on Teens

Alcohol can interfere with a young person's mental and physical growth processes. Research shows that brain development, which continues well into a person's 20s, can be affected by alcohol use. For example, a long-term study reported by the National Institutes of Health indicates that teens who abuse alcohol have poorer language skills than other teens. Research also suggests that exposure to alcohol during the teen years reduces levels of certain hormones essential to normal physical development.

According to a recent *New York Times* article, young people who are at the highest risk for early drinking include those with a history of abuse, family violence, depression, and stressful life events. A family history of alcoholism also raises the risk of beginning to drink before the age of 20 and becoming an alcoholic. Such drinkers are also reported to be more apt to underestimate the effects of drinking and to make judgment errors, such as going on binges or driving after drinking, than young drinkers without a family history of alcoholism.

The Effects of Alcohol on a Fetus

When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, it passes from her body into her developing baby's bloodstream. A fetus exposed to alcohol in this way may be born with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is a range (spectrum) of alcohol-related birth defects that include both physical and mental problems.

FASD is the leading known cause of intellectual disabilities and birth defects in the United States. The good news is that FASD is entirely preventable. Since even small amounts of alcohol can harm a fetus, the only safe decision for a pregnant woman is not to drink any alcohol at all.

People with FASD often have difficulty in the following areas:

- Coordination
- Emotional control
- School work
- Socialization
- Holding a job

Alcoholism

Alcohol can become addictive. Alcoholism is a progressive, chronic disease involving a mental and physical need for alcohol. People with this disease are called alcoholics. Alcoholics cannot control their drinking. They drink even when they know they are harming their health and hurting others. An addiction to alcohol is both psychological and physical. As we found out in a previous lesson, with a psychological addiction, the mind sends the body a message that it needs more and more alcohol. With physical addiction, the body develops a direct need for the drug. Either way, an alcoholic feels very uncomfortable when alcohol is withheld for even a brief period.



More than half of the drivers killed in nighttime automobile collisions are legally drunk.

© Duncan Noakes/Fotolia.com

Stages of Alcoholism

The seven stages of alcoholism are as follows:

- **STAGE 0: Non-drinker**—No alcoholic behavior or symptoms.
- **STAGE 1: Social drinking**—Up to one or two drinks per day routinely, depending on body mass, with no alcoholic behavior.
- **STAGE 2: Non-social drinking to reduce stress or tension**—The first signs of alcoholic behavior begin to appear, including an urgent need for the first drink of the day, and more than one or two drinks per day on a routine basis.
- **STAGE 3: Frequent "relief drinking" to escape stress**—More alcoholic behavior manifests: relief drinking most days to escape something, feelings of guilt about drinking, needing more drinks to get the desired result.
- **STAGE 4: Routine daily drinking to excess**—Significant alcoholic behavior and symptoms manifest: memory blackouts, hidden drinking.
- STAGE 5: Alcohol dependence—A wide range of additional alcoholic behaviors and symptoms manifest: more frequent memory blackouts, true dependence on alcohol, finding excuses to drink, unwillingness to discuss the problem, dramatic mood and behavior changes. Someone at this stage also continues to drink when others have stopped, repeatedly fails to follow through on commitments, tells lies, avoids family and friends, finds non-drinkers boring, and has difficulty keeping a job or managing money.

STAGE 6: End stage alcoholism—Obsessed with drinking, seldom eats, stays drunk for long periods of time, increasingly amoral behavior, health deteriorates, highly resentful of anything or anybody that interferes with their drinking, excessively emotional.

STAGE 7: Death

How Alcoholics Can Recover

A person who is addicted to alcohol is dependent on it. However, the addiction can be treated. *The process of learning to live an alcohol-free life* is called recovery. The steps of recovery are shown in Figure 4.6.

STEP 1—Admission

The alcoholic admits to having a problem and asks for help.

STEP 2—Detoxification

The alcoholic goes through detoxification, a process in which the alcoholic's body adjusts to functioning without alcohol.

STEP 3—Counseling

The alcoholic receives counseling on how to live without alcohol.

STEP 4—Recovery

The alcoholic takes responsibility for his or her own life.



FIGURE 4.6

Steps to Recovery

© DOC RABE Media/Fotolia.com

Recovering from alcoholism is difficult, but it can be successful. Just like drug addiction, the recovery process may involve withdrawal. Withdrawal symptoms include nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety. Treatment for alcoholism depends on the severity of the alcoholism and the resources available in your community. Treatment may include detoxification, the physical process of freeing the body of an addictive substance. "Detox" also involves helping the user overcome psychological dependence on the substance and regain health. Varieties of treatment centers are available to help people recover from alcoholism.

- **Detox units** are usually part of a hospital or other treatment center. Alcoholics remain under a doctor's care while going through detoxification.
- **Inpatient treatment centers** are places where people stay for a month or more to fully concentrate on recovery.
- Outpatient treatment centers are places where people get treatment for a few hours each day. Then they return to their homes and regular surroundings. Treatment may also include taking prescribed medications to help prevent a return to drinking (or relapse) once drinking has stopped and individual and/or group counseling. Such counseling often involves teaching alcoholics to identify situations and feelings that trigger the urge to drink and to find new ways to cope that do not include alcohol use.

Many alcoholics join support groups to help them be successful. These support groups help someone live a life of sobriety. Sobriety, which is *living without alcohol*, is a lifelong challenge. One of the best known of these support groups is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). AA is an organization of recovering alcoholics who know firsthand the difficulty of beating alcohol addiction. Most communities have chapters of AA. Listings for AA and other support groups for alcoholism can be found on the Internet or in the Yellow Pages of the phone book, usually under the heading "Alcoholism."

Help for the Family

The harmful effects of alcohol do not affect only the drinker. The drinker's family members and friends suffer as well. One in four families in the United States is affected by alcoholism. Alcohol abuse is a factor in the breakup of many families. Many cases of spousal abuse and child abuse involve someone who has been drinking.

A growing number of young people are living with a person who is addicted to alcohol. These teens may not realize that they need help for themselves as well as for the problem drinkers in their lives. The first step to take is to admit that the problem exists. The second is to reach out for help.

Many alcohol treatment centers offer help to family members of the alcoholic. These programs teach family members about alcoholism and provide individual and family therapy. Some family members join support groups where they can talk with other people who have faced the same problems. Two of these support groups are described here:

- **Al-Anon** helps family members and friends of alcoholics. Al-Anon members learn how to help themselves as well as the person dependent on alcohol.
- Alateen helps young people cope with having a family member or friend who is an alcoholic. Its members share their experiences and work together to improve their lives.

Listings for Al-Anon, Alateen, and other support groups for family members and friends of alcoholics can be found on the Internet at www.al-anon.alateen.org or by putting these terms into a search engine, as well as by looking in the Yellow Pages of the phone book, usually under the heading "Alcoholism."

How You Can Help

If a friend or family member has a problem with alcohol, he or she needs help. Always remember, however, that your most important responsibility is to yourself. If you are close to an alcoholic, try not to let that person's drinking problem change your own behaviors and attitudes. Below are some suggested ways provided by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD) you may want to use to help an alcoholic:

- Learn all you can about alcoholism and drug dependence—Utilize the resources we have provided including Learn About Alcohol, and Learn About Drugs and Family Education.
- **Speak up and offer your support**—Talk to the person about your concerns and offer your help and support, including your willingness to go with them and get help. Like other chronic diseases, the earlier addiction is treated, the better.
- Express love and concern—Don't wait for your loved one to "hit bottom." You may be met with excuses, denial, or anger, but be prepared to respond with specific examples of the behavior that has you worried.
- **Don't expect the person to stop without help**—You have heard it before—the person promises to cut down or stop, but it doesn't work. Treatment, support, and new coping skills are needed to overcome addiction to alcohol and drugs.
- **Support recovery as an ongoing process**—Once your friend or family member is receiving treatment, or going to meetings, remain involved. While maintaining your own commitment to getting help, continue to support their participation in continuing care, meetings, and recovery support groups. Continue to show that you are concerned about their successful long-term recovery.

Here are some things you don't want to do:

- **Don't preach**—Don't lecture, threaten, bribe, preach, or moralize.
- **Don't be a martyr**—Avoid emotional appeals that may only increase feelings of guilt and the compulsion to drink or use other drugs.
- **Don't cover up**—Don't lie or make excuses for them and their behavior.
- **Don't assume their responsibilities**—Taking over their responsibilities protects them from the consequences of their behavior.
- **Don't argue when they are using**—Don't argue with someone who is drinking or using drugs; at that point they can't have a rational conversation.
- Don't feel guilty or responsible for their behavior—It's not your fault.
- **Don't join them**—Don't try to keep up with them by drinking or using drugs.

Why Some Teens Drink Alcohol

You have learned that alcohol will harm your physical and mental/emotional health, and that drinking alcohol is against the law for teens. Why, then, do some young people experiment with alcohol? The following box lists some statements teens may give, followed by what they should know about alcohol.

Reasons to Refuse Alcohol

At least one-third of Americans do not drink alcohol at all, and many who used to drink have stopped. As people become aware of the physical and emotional damage that drinking can cause, fewer choose to start drinking. More and more young people are choosing not to drink also. Here are some of their reasons:

What Teens May Say and What Teens Should Know

What Teens May Say

- "I'll look more grown-up with a drink in my hand."
- "If I drink, I'll be able to forget my problems."
- "I'm stressed out about this test.
 A drink will help me relax."
- "My friends keep pressuring me to try alcohol."
- "The ads make drinking look like fun."

What Teens Should Know

- You won't look mature getting in trouble for illegal underage drinking.
- The problems will still be there when the effects of the alcohol wear off.
- Alcohol does not relieve stress; it disrupts sleep, creating more stress.
- Real friends won't pressure you to do something harmful.
- Alcohol companies want people to spend money on their products.

- It is illegal—Drinking is against the law for anyone under age 21. Obeying the law requires maturity and taking responsibility, and makes life easier and safer for everyone.
- It interferes with your activities—As a teen, your life is full of activities. You go to school, and you have family responsibilities and friendships. Teens who choose not to drink will be better able to meet these challenges.
- **It promotes foolish behaviors**—Drinking can make people sick. It can also cause them to embarrass or endanger themselves.
- It is not smart—Smart teens know that drinking does not enhance popularity. Drinking does not make a person more mature. Acting responsibly is a sign of maturity.
- It disappoints those who care about you— Teens who drink alcohol have to hide their behavior. Many young people would rather not have to be dishonest with people they care about.
- It harms your health—Drinking alcohol harms body organs, particularly the liver, and increases the chance for injuries.

As stated earlier in this lesson, for teens and others under the age of 21, using alcohol is illegal. In addition, schools have adopted a zero-tolerance policy. Under such a policy, students face stiff consequences, including suspension, starting with the first time they are caught with alcohol.



"We" is a key to success in refusal. If you see a friend being pressured to take a drink, use reverse peer pressure by saying:

- We don't need to drink to have fun.
- We don't want to drink.
- We've got something else to do.

Resisting peer pressure can make a young person feel very alone. But when the solitary "me" becomes a "we," peer pressure loses its strength.

Alternatives to Drinking Alcohol for Fun and Relaxation

Why do some teens give in to the pressure to drink alcohol? One reason is that they have not thought about alternatives. Alternatives are other ways of thinking or acting.

There are plenty of alternatives to drinking. A few of them are suggested here:

- **Become good at something that requires a steady hand**—Assemble a model airplane, play a video game, or paint a picture. Then congratulate yourself— a person whose senses are dulled by alcohol could not accomplish what you have.
- Join other teens for alcohol-free fun—Plan an alcohol-free party or outing, or have a basketball or volleyball game. Make sure all invited know that alcohol use will not be tolerated.

- **Volunteer to help others**—Volunteer at a hospital or nursing home, or lend a hand to a community improvement organization such as Habitat for Humanity.
- **Learn something new**—You might learn a musical instrument, computer program, or foreign language. Learn a sport you have never tried before, such as karate or kickboxing.
- Advocate—Volunteer to speak to an elementary school class about the dangers of alcohol and the benefits of remaining alcohol-free. Younger children look up to teens like you as role models.



Lesson 3 Review

Using complete sentences, answer the following questions on a sheet of paper.

- **1.** Define the term alcohol.
- **2.** What are the three media outlets used to influence choices made about alcohol?
- **3.** What is binge drinking?
- **4.** Define the term alcoholism.
- 5. What is Stage 1 alcoholism?
- **6.** Define the term sobriety.
- **7.** Name two support groups for families and friends of alcoholics.
- **8.** What is the main reason someone under the age of 21 should not drink?
- **9.** List five fun and relaxing things you could do that do not involve alcohol.

APPLYING YOUR LEARNING

10. One of your friends has a drinking problem. From the information you have read in this lesson, list three things you would do to encourage your friend to get help and why they would be helpful. Also list four things you should not do and why those things would not help your friend.