

# Binge Drinking and Under-Age Use

## *Just Say When*

### Depiction Suggestions

The following points for consideration regarding under-age use and binge drinking were developed as a resource for entertainment development and production. They are not meant to limit the creative process.

#### Under-Age Use:

- ◆ If a script calls for an under-age character to drink, consider accompanying such use with what the consequences may be: legal, physiological, behavioral, and accidental.
- ◆ Remember that 21 is considered the legal drinking age throughout the United States, however, many other countries allow drinking at age 17 or below (e.g., Germany).
- ◆ When possible, show the parents' involvement and reaction to their child's drinking. Do parents condone their children's drinking by ignoring it, treating it lightly, or by introducing them to their first drink? Do they send clear messages of zero tolerance? Could any of this be at the root of the under-age use or binge drinking?
- ◆ Consider showing the reaction of other youth when an under-age character is drinking, especially when it may be a criticism.
- ◆ Under-age drinking may have severely harmful effects on a student's performance in school and interactions with peers.
- ◆ Bear in mind that because of the metabolism of under-age alcohol users, there is more

potential for severe mental and motor function impairment.

#### College-Age Use and Binge Drinking:

- ◆ When referring to the behavior of a character, recognize that binge drinking, or heavy episodic drinking, is defined as the consumption of at least five drinks in a row for men or four drinks in a row for women.
- ◆ Try not to show excessive drinking without consequences, or with only pleasant consequences. For example, binge drinking is often linked with sexual assault, vandalism, and unsafe sex practices that can lead to transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- ◆ Consider showing the negative reaction of a college-age drinker's peers to his or her heavy alcohol consumption.
- ◆ Remember that many college students are not of legal drinking age. Therefore, where possible, avoid showing the illegal use of alcohol by those under age 21 without portraying the negative social, legal, and health-related consequences.
- ◆ When portraying college drinking, bear in mind that not all schools allow drinking on campus and "dry" rules with specific penalties can vary from school to school.

- ◆ Would it be appropriate to portray one or more characters who refuse the offer of a first or second drink?
- ◆ Attempt, where possible, to portray fraternity, sorority, and dorm parties that are not reliant on drinking and drinking games as the sole means of enjoying oneself.
- ◆ When appropriate, try to provide a balance between drinking students and non-drinking students. In reality, one in five students (19 percent) abstain from drinking alcohol.
- ◆ Avoid setting productions about college-age youth at alcohol-sponsored events such as spring break celebrations where binge drinking and drunken behaviors are glorified as normal.
- ◆ Make the connection between high-risk drinking and both violent, aggressive behavior (e.g., date rape) and victimization.
- ◆ Remember to show the lasting effects of binge drinking on the drinker, both psychological and physiological (see Medical Issues for Alcohol, Chapter 6).
- ◆ Remember that although heavy episodic drinking by adults is prevalent in society, it often does not receive the same level of media attention as binge drinking by under-age youth and college students.
- ◆ Bear in mind the impact of binge drinking on motor functions and reaction time, particularly where driving or operating machinery is concerned (see Impaired Driving, Chapter 5).

### **Adult Use – Heavy Episodic Drinking:**

- ◆ Consider showing the reaction of others to heavy alcohol consumption, especially when it may be a criticism.
- ◆ Avoid, when possible, showing excessive drinking without consequences, or with only pleasant consequences. Alcohol poisoning accompanies binge drinking all too frequently, often with deadly or near-fatal results.
- ◆ Try not to show binge drinking of alcohol as an activity that is so normal that everyone must indulge.



#### ***Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues***

Proprietary To:

**Entertainment Industries Council, Inc.**

[www.eiconline.org](http://www.eiconline.org)

1760 Reston Parkway, Ste. 415 • Reston, VA 20190-3303  
Telephone: (703) 481-1414 • Fax: (703) 481-1418

500 S. Buena Vista St • Burbank, CA 91521-7283  
Telephone: (818) 955-6845 • Fax: (818) 955-6870

## Binge Drinking and Under-Age Use

### Fact Sheet

#### College Use:

- ◆ Binge drinking, or heavy episodic drinking, is defined as the consumption of at least five drinks in a row for men or four drinks in a row for women.
- ◆ In a Harvard School of Public Health study conducted by a team of doctors and scientists, 119 four-year colleges and universities, which included 14,000 students, were surveyed on the extent of their binge-drinking behavior.<sup>1</sup>

1. Forty-four percent of U.S. college students engaged in binge drinking during the two weeks prior to the study.
2. The extent of binge drinking varied widely among U.S. colleges, ranging from zero at the school with the lowest level of drinking to 80 percent at the highest.
3. Compared to other students, college students who were binge drinkers in high school were almost three times more likely to be binge drinkers in college.
4. Students who are male, white, aged 23 years or younger, never married, belonged to fraternities, lived in fraternity houses, and binged in high school, continue to have higher binge drinking rates than their counterparts.

- ◆ Fifty percent of college-age men are likely to binge when they drink, while 40 percent of college-age women are likely to binge when they drink.<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ Among college students, 54 percent of men drink to get drunk, while 43 percent of women drink to get drunk.<sup>3</sup>

#### Under-Age Use:

Remember that most college-age students are under the legal drinking age in the United States. Therefore, most of the information found in this section can be cross-referenced to the College Use section above.

- ◆ Among teenagers who binge drink, 39 percent say they drink alone.<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ Of approximately 34 million Americans between the ages of 12 and 20, 9.5 million had at least one drink last month; of these people, 4.4 million were binge drinkers (consuming five or more drinks in a row on a single occasion).<sup>5</sup>
- ◆ Purchase and public possession of alcohol by people under the age of 21 is illegal in all 50 states.
- ◆ Fifty-eight percent of the teenagers who binge do so when they are upset.<sup>6</sup>
- ◆ Thirty percent of teens who binge say they do so when they are bored.<sup>7</sup>

- ◆ More than 37 percent of teenagers who binge do so to obtain the feelings one experiences when under the influence.<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ Use of alcohol at an early age is an indicator of future alcohol or drug problems.<sup>9</sup>
- ◆ Eighty percent of 12th grade students reported using alcohol during their lifetime in 1999, compared with 81.4 percent in 1998.<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ 73.8 percent reported using alcohol in 1999, compared with 74.3 percent in 1998.<sup>11</sup>
- ◆ 53.2 percent reported being drunk in 1999, compared with 52 percent in 1998.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ 30.8 percent reported consuming five or more drinks in a row within the last 2 weeks in 1999, compared with 31.5 percent in 1998.<sup>13</sup>

Sources:

1-5. Harvard School of Public Health, *Changes in Binge Drinking and Related Problems Among American College Students Between 1993 and 1997*, September 1999.

6-13. National Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE), *1998 PRIDE Survey*.

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