



HOPE Newsletter - Issue 72

Third of Teens Have Ridden with Impaired Driver

A recent study published in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs reported that one-third of teens who recently graduated from high school say they have ridden with a driver impaired by alcohol or drugs in the past year. Interestingly, these teens said they were more likely to ride with a marijuana-impaired driver than an alcohol-impaired driver. Experts believe that although many teens are getting the message about drunk driving, they are not realizing that the same risks are involved for a driver who has used drugs.

According to *The Washington Post*, 43 percent of drivers in fatal crashes in 2015 had used a legal or illegal drug. As marijuana and opioid use have increased, so have the number of car crashes associated with the drugs. Each different drug affects our brains in different ways, which then impacts our ability to drive. For example:

- Marijuana can slow reaction time, impair judgment of time and distance, and decrease coordination. Several studies have shown that drivers under the influence of marijuana were roughly twice as likely to be responsible for a deadly crash than drivers who hadn't used drugs or alcohol.
- Drivers under the influence of cocaine or methamphetamine are often aggressive and reckless when driving.
- Opioids cause slow reaction time, drowsiness, and clouded judgment.
- Research shows that the use of alcohol and marijuana together makes drivers more impaired than drivers who just used one of the substances.

Youth are already at a high risk for vehicle accidents due to their lack of driving experience. Teens are more likely than older drivers to speed, underestimate dangerous situations, and allow less distance between vehicles. When you add in possible impairment due to drugs or alcohol, it's no wonder that car crashes are the leading cause of death among young people aged 16 to 19 years. Parents need to inform teens to prevent these tragedies.

Tips to Prevent Teens from Driving Impaired or Riding with Someone Impaired

It is vital that parents address these new trends to keep teens safe. While most teens have heard lots of information about drunk driving, you should emphasize that using any drugs and then driving is a recipe for disaster.

Here are some tips to help prevent your teen from experiencing an accident associated with drugs or alcohol.

- Be specific in your expectations. Tell your teen to never drive after having consumed any amount of alcohol or drugs and to never ride with anyone who has been drinking or taking drugs, even if the driver does not appear impaired.
- Be a great role model. Here are a few things you should never do:
 - Never let your teen see you drunk.
 - Never drive after having a couple of drinks.
 - Never drive after using any drugs.
 - Never condone underage drinking or drug use.
 - Never serve alcohol or other drugs to minors.
- Know the details when your teen leaves the home: where are they going, who is going with them, what transportation are they using, and when will they be back.
- Whenever your teen is out for the night, encourage them to stay in one location rather than driving to a lot of places. Even if your teen and his/her friends are not drinking or using drugs, there are still other people on the roads who are.
- Have curfews and always wait up for your teen. Have a brief conversation and look for signs of alcohol or drug use.
- Don't allow your teen to spend the night at the house of a "friend" you don't know or where you know the parents don't supervise the kids.
- Offer safe ways for your child to get home. Tell your teen you will be available at all hours to pick him/her and his/her friends up – no questions asked – although you should recognize that they still may not want to do this for fear of your disapproval. If you live in an area with public transportation, give them information on how to use it. You could also potentially give them cab money to use in a bad situation, but there is always the chance that they will use the money on other things without you knowing.

Teach them the potential consequences of their actions, such as losing car insurance and/or drivers license, paying large fines and/or jail time, hurting someone, and having this mistake on their permanent record.

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