



Dear Parent,

Each year in Georgia, approximately 158 deaths are attributed to excessive alcohol use by individuals under 21. In our state, alcohol is the drug of choice among youth and consumption isn't just limited to college and high school students. In 2011, **34 percent of Georgia's middle school students** reported having at least one drink of alcohol in the past 30 days.

With so much at stake for our children, we need to put more emphasis on teaching them the dangers of alcohol before they ever pick up that first drink. Every adult – whether parent, teacher, mentor or community leader – has the opportunity to effect real change in the life of a child with alcohol education and open dialogue.

What many don't realize is that the alcohol children drink is often found at home. Whether sneaking liquor from the cabinets or drinking beer left behind by relatives at a family reunion, almost 45 percent of 12 to 14 year olds have reportedly received alcohol for free from home.

The harmful effects of alcohol do not require parent permission. By knowingly – or unknowingly – giving a minor access to beer, wine or liquor, you are providing that child with an increased risk for physical assault, sexual assault, tobacco and drug use and unprotected sexual activity.

We recently unveiled a new campaign in your community aimed at preventing underage drinking. The goal of "Give Yourself a Chance" is to educate local youth on the risks associated with alcohol use and empower them to resist the pressure to drink they often get from peers and media messages. Enclosed in this folder are materials designed to help you start a conversation with your child, as well as underage and binge drinking statistics, facts and resources. Talk to your child about their goals in life – and how avoiding alcohol can help them achieve those dreams.

It's not an easy task, but discussing alcohol use and abuse with your children, especially from an early age, can help ensure they don't take that first sip. It's time to step up and give youth a chance.

Sincerely,

Sue Laney
CEO, HEARTS for Families

Sue Laney is the CEO of HEARTS for Families, an organization contracted with the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and the Governor's Office for Children and Families to support programs throughout the state. For more information, visit www.HEARTSforFamilies.com/GYAC.



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