

Canton High School

A Community Conversation on the Dangers of
Underage Drinking

March 8, 2012



*I would that there were no age between
ten and twenty three...for there is nothing
in between but getting wenches with child,
wronging the ancients, stealing, fighting...
--Shakespeare (The Winter's Tale; Act III)*

Quotes from kids...

- My parents let me drink as long as I'm home – then they know I won't drink and drive.
- My mom told me I could have two jello shots – I took four and she didn't notice
- I learned how to play pong at family parties – we used to play with juice – I'm really good at it now!
- It's kind of a tradition in my house to get drunk at family functions.
- My parents would rather have me learn how to drink at home than at college.

Quotes from parents...

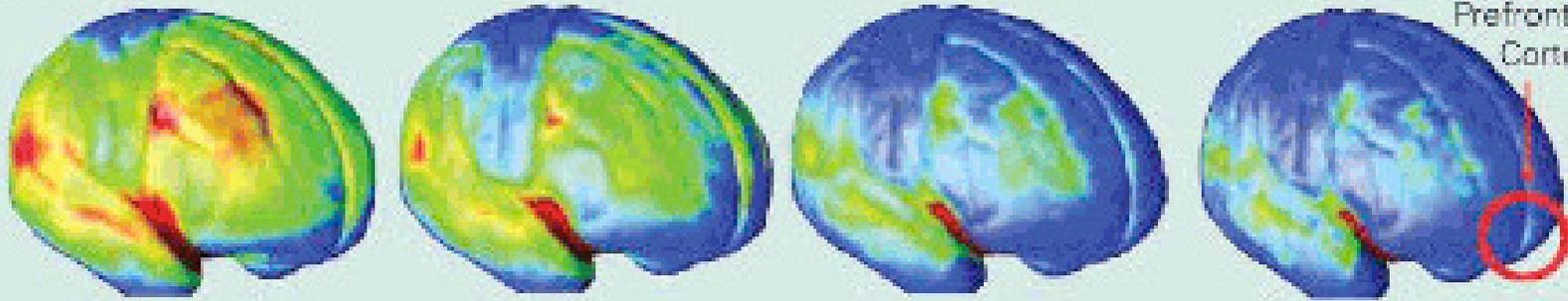
- I know if they're under my roof I can supervise them and make sure they're safe.
- At least they're not out there on the road.
- At least they're not doing 'real drugs'
- They're not doing anything I didn't do at that age.
- Telling a teenager not to drink is just going to make them want to do it more – like the forbidden fruit.
- I trust my kid...he/she is responsible.



5

AGES

20



Prefrontal
Cortex

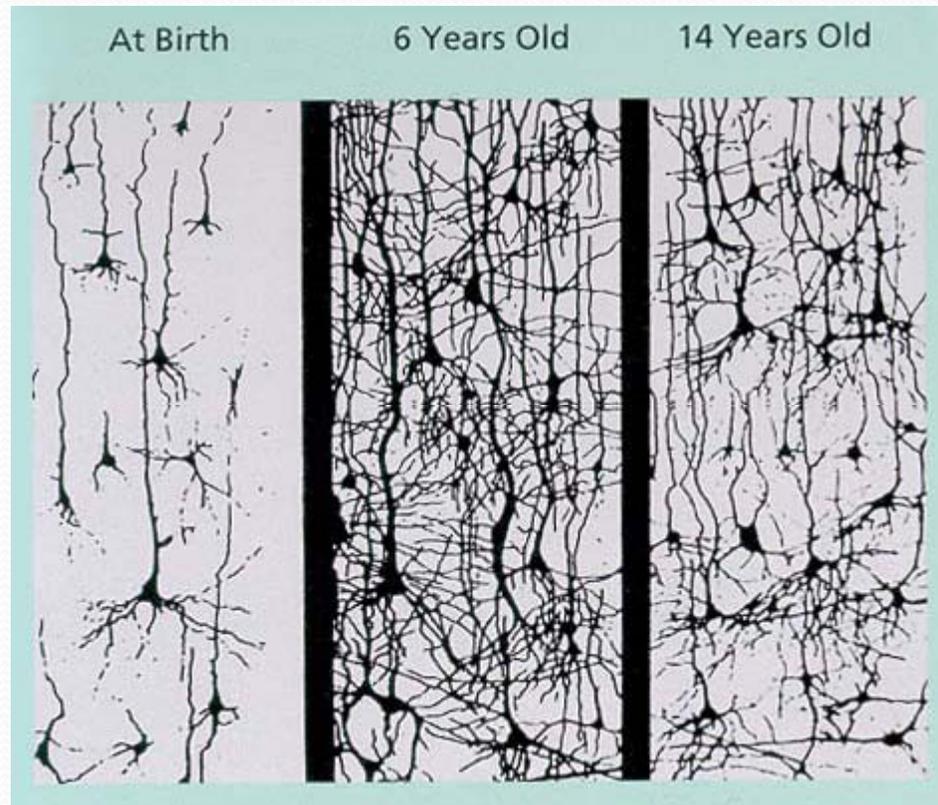
Blue represents maturing of brain areas.



Brain Development

- Gray matter thickens, then thins
- Neurons grow and develop like tree branches
- Branches are then pruned to give the brain its own individual shape
- During childhood, we acquire the skills to strengthen these pathways (along with genetic hardwiring)
- “Use it or lose it!”—less able to learn new things
- Brain becomes more efficient but less able to recover from trauma

Neural development



Frontal Cortex

- Responsible for planning, strategizing, and fluid problem-solving
- “CEO of the brain”
- Teens participate in risky behaviors due to immaturity of frontal cortex
- Rapid changes in dopamine-rich brain regions may make teens more vulnerable to drug and alcohol effects and long term addiction
- More likely to experiment during this time as dopamine is important for motivation and behavioral reinforcement (and addiction)



Puberty and Motivation/Emotion

- * Strongest links to pubertal changes per-se are in the domains of romantic motivation, sexual interest, emotional intensity, sleep/arousal regulation and appetite.
- * A general increase in risk-taking, novelty-seeking, sensation-seeking (reward-seeking).
- *This is not to say that bad behavior is excused.

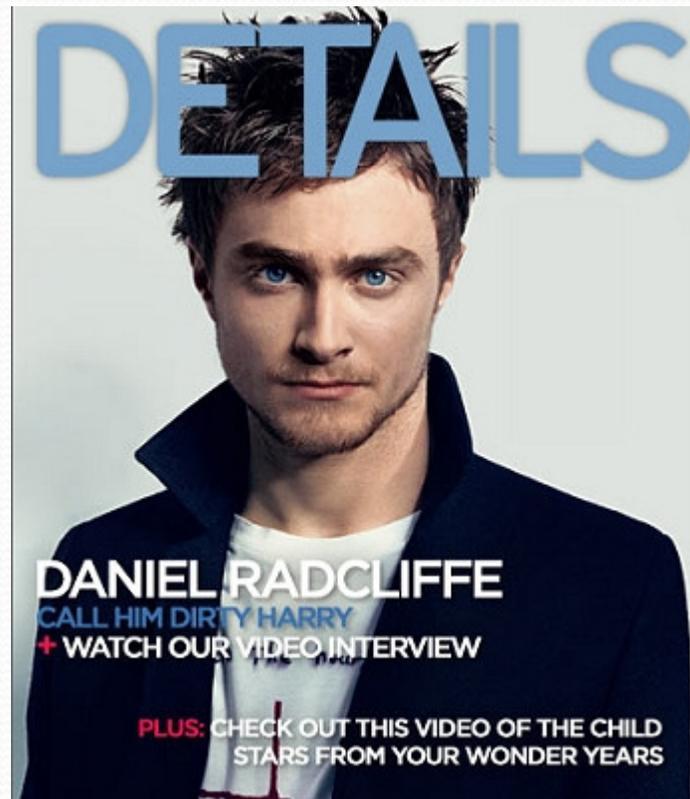
Adult Brain Expectations

- Has the ability to demonstrate self-control of behavior & emotions
- * Can appropriately inhibit or modify behaviors to avoid negative future consequences
- * Can initiate, persist and sequence steps toward goals and navigate complex social situations despite strong affect
- Skills in the self-regulation of affect and complex behavior to serve long-term goals
- Involves neurobehavioral systems in PFC -- *among the last regions of the brain to achieve full functional maturation*

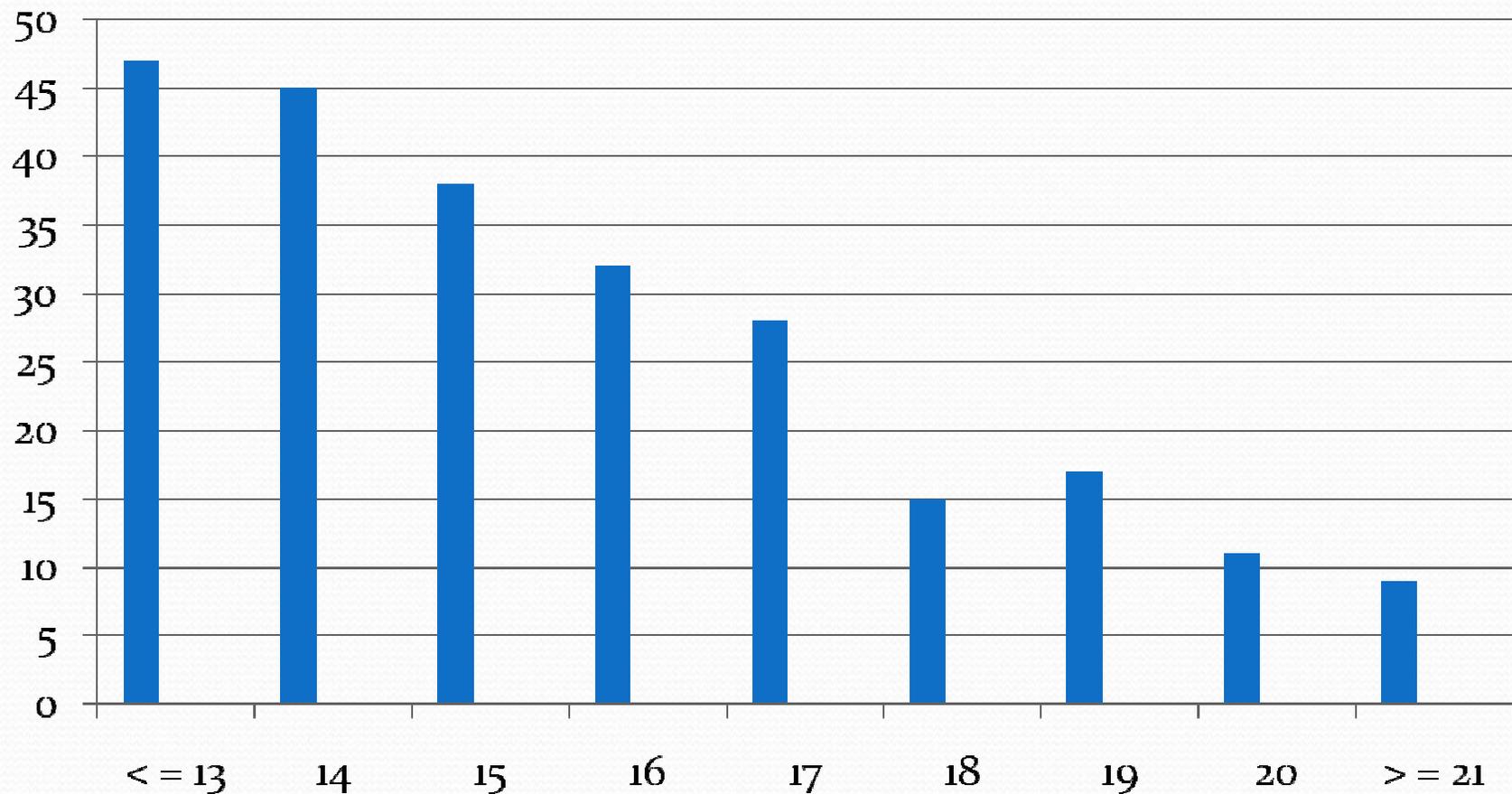
How quickly they grow.....



...to adulthood!



Risk of Alcoholism by Age of First Drink



Risk vs. Protective Factors

- Internal and external factors that either contribute or prevent substance abuse involvement and addiction
- An example of a risk factor is a family history of addiction
- An example of a protective factor is having friends who don't use drugs or drink.
- Some factors are beyond the control of parents – but many are not.
- Age of first use is the single most significant and controllable factor.

Teen Brains are at higher risk because:

- Their brains are wired to create greater reward sensitivity
- There is still an incomplete networking of the brain
- These behaviors quickly become hardwired into a developing brain (neuroplasticity)

Alcohol is a part of our culture

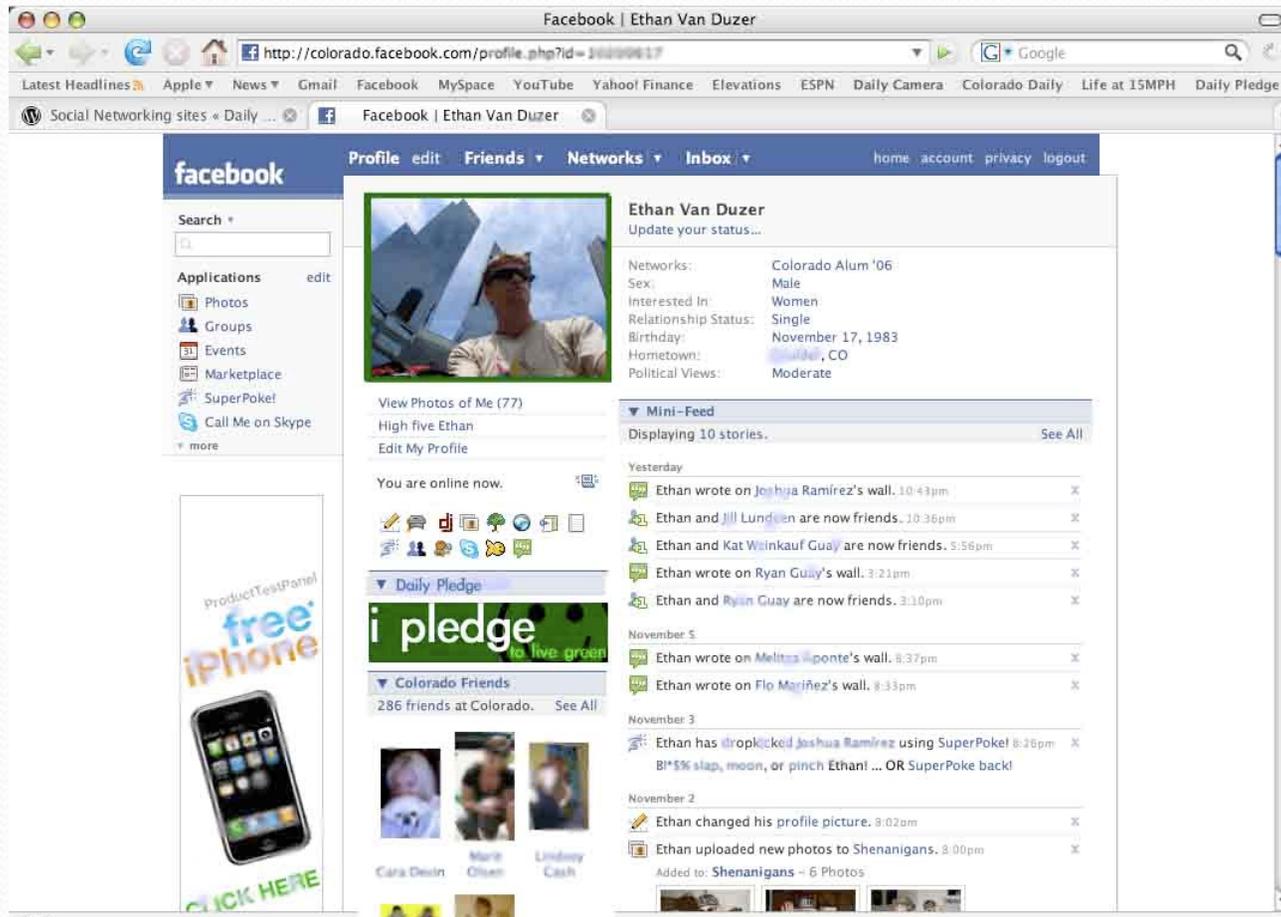
- Many factors influence the decisions our children make.
- Before graduating high school, students will spend about 18,000 hours in front of the television—more time than they will spend in school.¹⁰ During this time they will watch about 2,000 alcohol commercials on television each year.
- Corona:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnQTFBpcBpo>

Television

- Jersey Shore:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LheMOudJ6m4>

....and online



How do we change culture?

- Does this sound IMPOSSIBLE??
- We've done it before! It wasn't long ago when people used to smoke on airplanes and in restaurants....
- Or, when people didn't wear seatbelts!
- There are many examples of successfully challenging the status quo and making changes in our culture.

What can parents do?

- Understand that even good, bright and responsible kids make bad decisions sometimes. They need their parents to step in to help when necessary.
- Talk with your child – let them know how you feel about underage drinking.
- Know where your child is when they are not with you. Don't be afraid to ask where they're going, who they'll be with and what they'll be doing.
- Work with other parents to provide a network of support in the community
- Limit media access – but when drinking or other drug use comes up – use it as a teachable moment.
- Teach your child refusal skills and coping skills
- Be a good role model – how is drinking portrayed in your home? What messages are kids receiving from your actions?

Know the laws

- Anyone under 21 is prohibited from possessing alcohol on public OR private property unless accompanied by their own parent or guardian.
- Minors may be fined for violating the law.
- Individuals who knowingly permit minors to possess or consume alcohol may be fined, imprisoned or both.

Setting the rules

- Set clear rules and discuss in advance the **consequences of breaking them**. Don't make empty threats or let the rule-breaker off the hook. Don't impose harsh or unexpected new punishments.
- **The rules must be consistently enforced**; every time a child breaks the rules the parent should enforce a punishment.
- **Punishments should involve mild, not severe, negative consequences**. Overly severe punishments serve to undermine the quality of the parent-child relationship.
- **Set a curfew**. And enforce it strictly. Be prepared to negotiate for special occasions.
- **Have kids check in at regular times when they're away from home or school**.
- **Call parents whose home is to be used for a party**. On party night, don't be afraid to stop in to say hello (and make sure that adult supervision is in place).
- **Make it easy to leave a party where drugs are being used**. Discuss in advance how to signal you or another designated adult who will come to pick your child up the moment he or she feels uncomfortable. Later, **be prepared to talk about what happened**.
- **Listen to your instincts**. Don't be afraid to intervene if your gut reaction tells you that something is wrong.

Concerns

- Will my child be ostracized if I take a hard stand on this issue? What will it do to our relationship?
- Will our family/my child be ostracized if I call the police to notify them of a party?
- What if my child has already begun drinking?
- Can I expect my child to change his/her friends if I think they are a bad influence?
- What do I do if I'm worried about someone else's child?
- Where can I go for more information or help?

Resources...

- The Canton police department has a telephone number that does not have caller ID (860)693-0221
- www.settherulesct.org has all the most current laws that apply to alcohol, hosting parties and driving
- www.theantidrug.com is a great site for conversation starters and what to look for in a person who you suspect has been using a substance.
- PBS Frontline –excellent program on the adolescent brain <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/>
- McCall Foundation: Maria – (860)496-6112 or Kevin (860)496-2139. Insight Program at Canton High School is available for students.