



SADD Talking Points About the Minimum Drinking Age 21 (MDA21)

- Lowering the drinking age would likely do little, if anything, to reduce problematic drinking behaviors on college campuses. College students who are 21 and older engage in binge drinking at dangerous levels.
- Lowering the drinking age would contribute to the trend of younger students using alcohol because alcohol would now move legally into the high school community where many high school students are 18 and would be able to legally purchase alcohol.
- According to SADD's national *Teens Today* research, students in grades 6-12 ranked the drinking age as the number one reason why they choose not to use alcohol.
 - This data disproves the myth that if drinking alcohol were legal for younger students, they wouldn't be attracted to it.
- Permitting children to drink at home correlates with higher levels of underage drinking. According to SADD's national *Teens Today* research, high school teens who tend to avoid alcohol are more than twice as likely as those who repeatedly use alcohol to say their parents never let them drink at home (84 percent versus 40 percent).
- Compelling factual information from *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking*:
 - Alcohol use by young people is a leading contributor to death from injuries, plays a significant role in risky sexual behavior, increases the risk of assault, and is associated with academic failure and illicit drug use.
 - An estimated 1,700 college students die each year from alcohol-related injuries.
 - About 600,000 college students are injured while under the influence of alcohol.
 - Approximately 700,000 college students are assaulted by other students who have been drinking.
 - About 100,000 college students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assaults or date rapes.
- Alcohol can cause permanent damage to a still-developing young adult brain.
 - Alcohol consumption has the potential to trigger long-term biological changes that may have negative effects on the developing brain of a young adult.
 - Alcohol has been shown to impair one's ability to evaluate risk and reward when making decisions.
- Conflicted adults are a huge part of the problem. By ignoring the issue, they perpetuate the fallacy that drinking by youth is inevitable and really no big deal.
- Studies have shown that prevention initiatives can have an impact on the rates of underage drinking and lead to changes in youth behavior around drinking.

Common arguments for lowering the drinking age and SADD's responses

- The drinking age used to be 18 and young adults handled it OK then.
 - When the drinking age was moved up again to 21, youth fatalities due to drinking decreased significantly.
 - The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that the minimum legal drinking age of 21 has reduced traffic fatalities involving 18- to 20-year-old drivers by 13 percent and has saved more than 25,000 lives since 1975.
- In Europe, where the drinking age is lower than 21, they don't have the same problems with young adult drinking as the U.S. does.
 - Actually, in all European countries except Turkey, the rate of binge drinking among young people is higher than the rate in the U.S.
 - Six years ago New Zealand lowered the drinking age to 18. Since then, alcohol-related crashes have increased by 12 percent among 18- to 19-year-olds and 14 percent among 15- to 17-year-olds. New Zealand is considering increasing the drinking age again.
- Young people who are old enough to fight and die for their country and mature enough to vote are responsible enough to drink.
 - Studies have shown that adolescents generally do as well as adults when making reasoned decisions in emotionally neutral situations. This is not the case in situations where underage drinking is likely to occur, where peers are present and/or in emotionally charged settings. Society has a responsibility to protect young people and those around them from the consequences of poor decisions.
- Underage drinking is inevitable. No matter what we do, teenagers are going to drink.
 - There are many proven effective steps we as a community can take to change teen behavior and discourage dangerous decisions. The experience of SADD and other organizations in changing the culture around drinking and driving proves the point. Between 1982 and 1995, the number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities dropped by 60 percent as a result of concerted actions to discourage drinking and driving. A similar change in youth culture occurred around the issue of smoking.
 - There is a body of prevention research that shows that many effective steps can be taken to make campuses safer and decrease underage drinking and binge drinking.