

SANTI SAYS: Teenage drinking is a great remover of things.

By Santi Meunier

My heart sunk when I read that gold medalists, Michael Phelps was arrested for drunk driving at the age of 19 years old. Phelps, who won a record of eight medals in the Athens Olympics this past summer. As a result of his extraordinary success he has seven national and international sponsors including giant swimwear apparel company, Speedo. These sponsorships translates into millions of dollars for the young athlete. Now, in light of his arrest and possible imprisonment, his career is in jeopardy. In one evening where he exercised poor judgment his years of hard work and dedication are at risk. Can his image be salvaged? Only time will tell, but the experience will effect the rest of his young life. No one is immune to the negative effects of alcohol abuse.

Drinking Games

Beer ping pong is a popular game amongst college students. The game promises a "buzz" to end all buzzes. Ping pong balls are flung into beer glasses and the loser has to chug-a-lug the tumblers. The amount of alcohol that can be consumed in a short period of time is in lethal proportions. College and university students drinking games are a part of college life, unfortunately it can be a

deadly part of college life. The MIT student Scott Krueger drank himself to death in 1997. The celebrations around sports has also been a tragic arena for lethal drinking. The Red Socks extraordinary win was no exception. Since 1993, the percentage of binge-drinking college students has remained at an alarming 44%. I feel the problem is actually much worse. The Social Norms Resource Center defines a binge drinker a one who consumes more than 4 or 5 drinks in one sitting over a two week period.

Alcohol abusers are getting younger and younger

According to the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (SAMHSA)1998 survey 19% of the boys between 12 and 17 have used alcohol in the past month. Nearly 3 in 10 (29%) consume six or more alcoholic beverages each time they drink. The average age at which boys first try alcohol is 11 years. Teenage boys who drink take more sexual risks with girls, engage in binge drinking, use marijuana in conjunction with alcohol and are more likely to drink and drive.

Girls are beginning to drink at younger and younger ages. According to SAMHSA's 1998 survey 38% of girls 12through 17 reported using alcohol. The risk

factors for girls is somewhat different than for boys. One study found symptoms of depression among teenage drinking girls 50% higher than in teenage boys. Among 8th grade girls who drink heavily, 37% reported attempting suicide compared to 11% who do not drink.

Parents and teachers pay attention

Some of the behavioral symptoms for both adolescents and adults are:

Mood swings; personality changes; defensiveness, overly-emotional; overly self-centered; manipulative; strained and difficult communications; withdrawal from family; changes in dress, friends, likes and dislikes; lack of self-discipline; apathy; school/work problems; anxious behavior; fearful; fitful sleep patterns etc.

If you notice any of these changes please don't put off confronting it. Adolescence is a difficult time for everyone in the family. Children change and grow so rapidly and with hormones and other "growing pains" moods can take on dramatic proportions. Some of this is perfectly normal, no matter how hard it is to deal with at the time. Separating what is normal from what is a danger signal is the responsibility of each



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parent and care-giver. There is too much to lose if we ignore the challenge. A wonderful book for any parent dealing with a difficult youngster is "TOUGHLOVE".

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