

youthESource Bible Study

Let's Talk: Alcohol Use & Abuse

by Marilyn Bader

INTRODUCTION

Are your youth involved with alcohol? It is quite likely!

The issue of alcohol use and abuse is one which touches every person in your group in some way—whether it is a parent, a brother a sister, a friend or that person who has the problem. In this piece, you will explore the problem of alcohol abuse among teenagers. Youth will gain understanding for the reasons that people may begin to use or abuse alcohol and will seek alternative sources of support. Youth will be encouraged to help those around them who are troubled by alcohol or other chemical abuse. Finally, youth will discuss ways to have fun in life without alcohol.

Certainly, this topic may surface personal experiences and unresolved issues. Be cautious and use sensitivity when presenting this material

SUGGESTED USES FOR THIS RESOURCE

- Use for a Bible study.
- Use at a retreat or lock-in event.
- Give a copy to a youth who comes to you with concerns about a friend who has an alcohol problem.
- Present this information at a night for parents of adolescents.
- Train your peer ministers about alcohol use/ abuse using this piece as a focus.

Leader's Notes

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

Before youth arrive fill a large container (such as a laundry tub) with water. Place a plastic drop cloth or large plastic trash bag under the container for protection purposes OR consider doing the opening activity outdoors if you are able. Divide participants into four equal groups and give them a "survival" bag filled with varied quantities of the following items: deflated balloons, one medium-sized rock, Dixie or Styrofoam cup(s), cotton balls, marshmallows, straws.

Explain that in 10 minutes a survival contest will begin for their rock. Their goal is to construct an environment to help their rock float in the bucket using the materials in their survival bag. They may choose to use any or all of the materials at their disposal. Allow 10 minutes for construction. Call "time" and have each group place their rock in the water. The rock that survives or stays afloat the longest is declared the winner!

Debrief the activity using these questions:

- What did you have to consider in order to help your rock float?
- what kept the surviving rock afloat the longest?
- how did you feel when your group's rock sunk?
- Have you ever had that sinking feeling? What are some situations people find themselves in where they get pulled down and can't seem to stay afloat?
- Who or what keeps you from "sinking"?

Add a few comments such as: It seems easy to keep our heads above water when we are on firm ground. It is more difficult to feel confident when we get in over our heads or get weighed down. When we feel we are sinking, everyone looks for a way to survive—a coping device, something that will hold us up until we feel good again. Review the coping strategies listed in response to the last question. Are there any strategies that could create that sinking feeling in the long run? Which items may bring about positive, long-lasting effects; which are potentially destructive in either the short or long run?

HOW DO SINKING PEOPLE COPE?

What about others who felt like they were sinking?

The Bible has several examples of people who found themselves in difficult positions related to water and had to cope with it. A number of examples are listed below. You may wish to use these as the basis of your study. If your group is well versed in Scripture, they may think of many others, and these may be just a starting point. (If you choose this option, have youth work in teams to brainstorm, in 10 minutes, a list of examples of Biblical people who were "sinking" and how they coped with the situation.)

Think about people in the Bible who were "sinking" in difficult situations dealing with water. What was the situation? How did they cope? Think of...

JONAH (Jonah 1-2) How did Jonah cope both negatively and positively?

NOAH (Genesis 7:1-10) God promised the "water of Judgment." Only Noah heard. How must Noah have felt as he handled the peer pressure? How did he cope with the situation?

PETER (Matthew 14:22-33) Peter had mixed emotions to our Lord's command to "come." Describe his feelings as he started out and as he sunk.

MOSES (Exodus 14) Moses and the parting of the Red Sea

JESUS (John 2:1-11) The wedding at Cana. How did Jesus react to his mother's plea for help?

PILATE (Matthew 27:11-16) Pilate washed his hands of Christ's death. Do we ever wish to get rid of problems as easily as he did? (Did Pilate really get rid of the guilt?)

Bring the Bible study to closure by sharing comments about coping and the choices God gives us. The results are positive and long lasting when people rely on their faith in God and their relationship with Him to buoy them up. However, instead of looking to God for support, people choose a temporary buoyancy to prop them up, to cope with the struggles of life. Alcohol and other chemicals are chosen with all too familiar frequency.

WHY DO TEENAGERS DRINK?

What kinds of situations might cause teenagers to drink alcohol? Which of the following have you heard?

- "I'm so stressed that I just need to relax."
- "I just need to escape on the weekends."
- "It just makes me feel better."
- Any others?

Continue this list. make a second list which describes the reasons that adults drink.

Look at both lists together. Discuss the following:

- Look for similarities and differences. Why are the priorities different? Which are risky or self-defeating?
- What concerns you about the number of youth who drink?
- How do you respond to people, particularly friends, who drink too much?
- Do you know someone, a teen perhaps, who is recovering from alcoholism? Without identifying them, describe how they were before they sought help and what life is like for them now. (If youth do not know someone who is recovering, ask them if they have seen changes in the person as they continue to abuse alcohol and what life might be like for them.)
- In what ways does pressure to drink effect you? How do you respond to teens or friends who are drinking at parties?

Alcoholism, like other diseases, has symptoms that indicate someone has the disease or is at risk for becoming addicted. What are the symptoms you thought of when asked if you knew someone in trouble with alcohol? How do you think this person feels about themselves on the inside? What is the ultimate result of dependence on alcohol?

Complete the following chart on newsprint. (Some examples have been listed.)

ACTIONS	FEELINGS	APPEARANCE
Blackouts	Guilt	May be male or female
Friends also use alcohol	Fear of getting caught	Wears clothes with alcohol logos
Denying level of use	Sneaky	
Partying increases	"Relief" of problems	
Drinks alone		
Tolerance level is high		

CAN I HELP MYSELF OR OTHERS?

Suggest that if you believe that someone you know truly has a problem, talk about it with a trusted adult or with others who are equally concerned about the person. This disease will not be cured without help. to make youth aware of local resources which are available, distribute phone books to the group. Have youth (possibly in groups of 3-5) locate local resources that are available. Develop a list, that can be distributed at a later date, that can be used as a resource. Include local social service agencies, AA or Alanon/Alateen numbers, etc.

- How can the church, your youth group and you help someone move from life with "spirits" to life in the Spirit?
How can you help this person feel good about who they are and help them belong to the family of God?
- How should we see ourselves as children of God?
- Check out the following verses: Matthew 10:40-42, Romans 8:26-27, Romans 14:1-4, Romans 12:16.

Highlight in your discussion that we need to reach out in love to those who are struggling with a problem such as alcohol abuse. Too often they hear words of accusation and condemnation when they need to know God's love and forgiveness. Speak words of forgiveness and of the power each of us has through the Holy Spirit. Encourage members of the group to talk to you or the pastor if they are concerned about themselves, a family member or friend.

HOW CAN I "BELONG" WITHOUT FEELING LIKE A FISH OUT OF WATER?

Ask participants for suggestions on how to avoid the sinking feeling of the "drinking to fit in" whirlpool. How can we encourage positive peer pressure to avoid the temptation to use alcohol?

- What is your attitude about alcohol?
Many teens do not believe there are many risks associated with having a drink or two. How does the phrase "it won't happen to me" apply to this discussion? Is our body a temple to the Lord or a pool to drown our sorrows in? What are other consequences of alcohol use/abuse?
- What could the community do to give youth an alternative to drinking?
What would it take to open up a teen coffee house on the weekends for local youth in the community? What does your school do? What does the church do? What could the church do?

Close with a prayer for those struggling and falling prey to the temptations of alcohol use and abuse and addiction. Pray that they go through life walking on water with the Spirit, not drowning in the spirits.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

- "What's a Person to Do? Helping Youth with Drug/Alcohol Addictions" by Marilyn Bader, at www.youthESource.com/2009/09/04/whats-a-person-to-do-helping-youth-with-drugalcohol-addictions/
- "Not by Student" by Kyle Frazier, at www.youthesource.com/2009/09/04/not-my-student/
- Local social service or mental health agencies such as a National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse may have films available on this topic. Local chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous may also have resource suggestions.
- Search Institute has excellent information available. www.search-institute.org.
- Consider the issue of binge drinking on college campuses. Meet with your graduating seniors before they head to college to alert them to what they might find and to prepare them to resist the peer pressure and to help others who might have a problem.
- Use a newspaper or local news websites to find incidents of other alcohol-related problems such as DUI. Discuss the other negative effects that drinking has on people, families, friends, society at large.
- Find clips of movies or TV shows which show drinking. Discuss the effects that such media images have on attitudes about alcohol.
- Teach up with other civic organizations such as SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving) to plan an awareness event.

Originally published in 1999.

Updated for youthESource April 2015

youthESource is published on the Web by the LCMS Office of National Mission—Youth Ministry. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 South Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; 1-800-248-1930; www.youthesource.com. Editor: Sherrah Holobaugh Behrens. VOL. 12 NO. 4. April 2015.

Let's Talk: Alcohol Use and Abuse

HOW DO "SINKING" PEOPLE COPE?

Think about people in the Bible who were "sinking" in difficult situations dealing with water. What was the situation? How did they cope? Think of...

JONAH (Jonah 1-2)

NOAH (Genesis 7:1-10)

PETER (Matthew 14:22-33)

MOSES (Exodus 14)

JESUS (John 2:1-11)

PILATE (Matthew 27:11-16)

WHY DO TEENAGERS DRINK?

What kinds of situations might cause teenagers to drink alcohol? Which of the following have you heard:

- "I'm so stressed that I just need to relax."
- "I just need to escape on the weekends."
- "It just makes me feel better."
- Any others?

Continue this list. Make a second list which describes the reasons that adults drink.

HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF OR OTHERS?

How can the church, your youth group and you help someone move from life with "spirits" to life in the Spirit?

How should we see ourselves as children of God?

Check out the following verses:

Matthew 10:40-42, Romans 8:26-27, Romans 14:1-4

Romans 12:16

HOW CAN I "BELONG" WITHOUT FEELING LIKE A FISH OUT OF WATER?

What is your attitude about alcohol? Is it okay to have a couple of drinks or should it be avoided altogether?

What could the community do to give youth an alternative to drinking?