

# 13

## Dating Under the Influence

**In January** of 2008, a newspaper article stunned the nation. A mom from Iowa put her son's own vehicle up for sale because she found booze in his car. Yep, sold it right out from under him. Her name was Jane, and she was dubbed The Meanest Mom on the Planet.

There were plenty of heated debates around the water coolers the next day. Grown-ups everywhere took either the side of the poor victimized teen who had a cruel, twisted mother or the side of the mom, who, in one championship move, became a hero overnight.

Teens everywhere were, of course, outraged at this crazy mother. "She had no right to do that. Who does she think she is?" They could not conceive that maybe Jane thinks she is that misguided boy's responsible parent, the guardian of his safety, or something equally outlandish: his protector. The nerve of that woman. Somehow I don't picture Jane at her kitchen table with a latte and a legal pad writing the pros and cons of how people would feel about her if she sold her son's car. One thing was certain — that teen never had a chance to wrap *that* car around an old oak tree after a couple of keg-stands and a tequila shot. Instead, he lived to watch someone else drive away in his now famous "bar-on-wheels."

No matter where you stand on this story, you have to admit that particular mother took drastic measures to save her son's life. She drew the line in concrete, not sand. Sober concrete. She is not alone. We've all heard of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving). MADD is an organization born from tragedy. And it's not just moms anymore rebelling and rising up. There are dads, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and friends who have had life altering (or ending) moments because of a drunk driver. These outraged loved ones work very hard to prevent the next tragedy.

But the tragedies still pile up. People get behind the wheel, intoxicated, and create absolute chaos. Others get behind the wheel, just as intoxicated, but somehow squeak their way home. There are plenty of folks who have simply gotten lucky and gotten away with it— managed to weave their drunken selves home from the party or the bar, and this time, this one lucky instance, they swerved just in time to miss the lamppost, or the oncoming station wagon, or the pair of tottering grandmothers.

Many of the adults reading this book will know of someone who drove intoxicated and sideswiped a guardrail, but lived to tell of it. In fact, when I was in high school, it was a rare teen that did *not* have a drunk driving story to tell. The drinking age was only eighteen then. Most kids had possessed their licenses for less than two years. They would pour Mad Dog 20/20 into the depths of their inexperience, captain a two-ton boat through the dark streets with blurred vision, and pull into their parents' garage hoping the door was up. Some of those stories might even belong to you personally. Although choosing to share these experiences with your teen is your decision, at least use the wisdom that you gained. Would you want to stake your child's life on a precious sliver of luck or convince them that driving under the influence is about as wise as lighting a match at the gas pump?



**Is “high” way dating taking your student off course?**

“Get off my back!” we used to shout at our parents or at The Man who was trying to keep us down (when they were really only trying to keep us safe and sober.) “Parents are just killjoys. Authority just ruins the fun.” No, authority, The Man, would simply rather you not be blinded by alcohol when you drive inebriated passed his house. Near his children. Around his dog. You with the raging hormones and sense of immortality. Your parents like your face the way it is. Unbroken, jaw in one piece, all that orthodontia they paid for still intact. They like your face. They don’t want to see it marbled with windshield scars. It isn’t overly dramatic, it’s overly possible.

“Gee, Mom, Graham’s fraternity brothers drive home every Saturday night when they’re wasted, and they make it home safe all the time. And they’re in college.” That must mean they’re smart? No, honey, they’re insane. Lucky maybe, but still insane. It’s no smarter than being duct taped to a tree and letting your buddies throw knives at you. Most of the time they are going to miss. But every now and then...

I know, I know, teens feel oppressed and held down. And the minute they have a story that starts with, “We got so wasted, dude,” and ends with “I don’t know how we got home,” they feel they’ve earned some kind of honorary badge that they must parade around on their key chains. The “I’m a Drunken Fool” amulet dangles right next to the “I Got My Girl Pregnant and Left Her for Someone New” medal. Oh, yeah. *That’s* something to be proud of.

So how do you combat this mistaken impression that getting wasted “rules, Dude”? That Girls Gone Wild is not the way we select the next generation’s leaders? Maybe take them downtown at night to walk among the homeless. Among those sad wanderers who have been chopped up, spit out, and rendered irrelevant by Lady Alcohol. Maybe you could stroll through the Neo-natal

Intensive Care Unit and coo at the two-pound crack babies who, if they're lucky enough to grow up, will be blind and asthmatic, destitute and dulled by what their mothers did to "have fun."

I had a conversation with a friend of mine about what happens to those partying people we knew in high school. Now that we're in (yikes!) middle age, we talked about how those decisions to live it up and get high affected our "real lives" today.

*"Brian and I met in our early 20's. I fell for him the minute I met him. He was tall, had a beautiful smile, and was the funniest man I had ever met. We did everything together: dancing, hang gliding, scuba diving, road trips. He was adventurous—there was nothing he wouldn't try. We loved to party together and squeeze the most out of life, but almost always with a little added liquid courage. Or in his case, powdered courage. I chose Vodka Tonics to enhance our escapades; he chose cocaine. We'd get high and talk through the night about how blissful the rest of our lives would be. Getting high was our link to each other. It was what we did as a team. Underneath the buzz we might be dancing or discussing Van Gogh's left ear, but the cord that bound us together was getting high—a false simulation of the real world.*

*"After dating for two years we had a picture-perfect wedding. When I got pregnant, I slowed my partying way down, but Brian never stopped. His job was "stressful" and he needed his coke and his vodka for "tension." He was self-medicating. When he wasn't high he was depressed, moody, and lazy. He spent more time in his chair with his vices than he did with his family. We fought about the same things that brought us together—drinking and drugs. Brian was not fun, Brian did not take me dancing, Brian was gone. Who was this blob in the chair with the angry stare? Where was the beautiful man I married?*

*We divorced after six years of marriage. The real Brian had disappeared under a cloud of booze and cocaine.*

*The real Brian spiraled out of our lives in a cyclone of substance abuse. I look back now and realize, sadly, that maybe I never had the chance to know the real Brian, only the altered Brian.”*

There are no funny stories to tell in this chapter, only warnings to impart. We are so familiar with the cautions of driving under the influence, that it’s practically a cultural staple. Old men can sit plastered on a front porch and shout, “Hey, kid. Don’t drink and drive!” like it’s the neighborhood slogan. It wouldn’t surprise me if the latest kid’s Sing-a-Long Road Trip CD contained such happy little hits as “Blow into this Tube, Tanya” and “Point Oh Eight, Point Oh Eight, Don’t Let your Level Hit Point Oh Eight.” We know we’re not supposed to drink and drive. In drinking and dating, on the other hand, the rules are far less defined and nearly impossible to enforce.

Drinking and dating is a different kind of dangerous. Not only does it contain the driving component but dating under the influence can accelerate a person into a wall of heartache that hurts as much, if not more than concrete. The scars can be external as well as internal. Let’s break it down into five parts: Fun, Fake, Feelings, Fysical, Fling. (Yes, yes, I know it’s “physical” but that does not “phit” the alliteration.)



**Does your date need a pill for a thrill?**

**Fun**

I heard an expression several years ago, “I never met an alcoholic I didn’t like.” There might be a tiny bit of truth in that. We are drawn to the happy partier, the rejoicing “Whoo-hoo” guys. We like to join in when people are celebrating. Drinking can add something that’s missing— confidence or wit. Or take away those undesirable traits we don’t like— fear, tension, inhibitions and low self-esteem. Those built in fears and inhibitions are there for a reason— they keep us from dancing on balconies wearing beads and a cat mask. Drinking can be a lot of fun. At least in

the beginning, until the depressive effects of alcohol set in and you wake up one morning wrapped in toilet paper stuffed in a grocery cart inside a men's locker room shower stall. Yeah, why don't you get *that* on tape? "Whoo-hoo."



### Model It...

Okay, we're going to observe some actual folks under the influence. If your student is old enough, take him or her to a local restaurant or pub to see the "live" versions. If your student is under age, do your research on YouTube™. (The bar will have more of an impact, but you can navigate to a larger variety of venues on YouTube™. There will be no shortage of material in either place.)

#### Live:

Pretend you and your student are employers assessing the characters of people you might want to hire to drive your school bus. Find six individuals in the bar and study them for the next 30 minutes. Have your student write down the personality changes they observe in their potential bus driver. Record changes in behavior, voice, language. Do these people seem to get friendlier? More demanding? More touchy-feely? Write down how much fun everyone is having.

#### YouTube™:

(Search for these videos ahead of time without your student nearby to screen out inappropriate content.) Type in "bar scene videos" or "teens drinking" and select several examples of teens "reacting to alcohol." Use the same evaluation as above to study the behavior in the videos of a half dozen people.

**Now ask your teen if they would hire any of these people to assemble their automobiles, do their homework, or perform surgery on their dog. Ask if it would be okay to invite these same people over to live with you, permanently. Or, how would your teen feel if they saw you (the parent) in the video behaving this way?**

Watching others getting high while staying sober yourself might seem “odd,” but it can be a real eye opening experience. (“I can’t believe Brianna actually jumped out the upstairs window after Ted. That’s gonna mess up her volleyball career.”) (“Dan is crazy. I don’t know what he was on, but he ate at least four fish out of Doc Randall’s aquarium. Wait until she gets back from her snorkeling vacation.”)

We tend to tolerate, and even encourage each other to “loosen up” to have more fun. Do your kids only see adults enjoying themselves while they’re under the influence? (“Mr. Hampton is hysterical after he has his evening Martini. He cracks the best jokes about his wife!”) Make sure your student has an opportunity to witness adults having fun in sober circumstances: sliding down a zip line, mountain biking, or building a sand castle. What does your own student do to “live a little”? Boredom in a teen’s life is deadly. Make sure you offer them healthy choices to excite their minds and bodies to keep them sober but stimulated. Consider giving them a pass to an indoor climbing wall as a gift instead of another video game. Here’s a thought... go with them!



**Enhanced experiences can lead to a thrilling spiral downward.**

### **Fake**

Movies, TV, advertisements and all the glittery images of Hollywood can paint a seductive picture of drinking, drugs, and relationships. What is *less* than obvious to gullible teens is that the camera might show you 30 seconds of beauty (“Mmm, that’s

a hot, manly man drinking that frosty, cold beer,") but once the camera shuts off Mr. Budly Studly is throwing up on his shoes.

In relationships, this dual image can also exist, especially if one of the people is under the influence. Maybe their new GF is shy and drinking helps her be more outgoing or confident. Maybe their BF is high strung and smoking mellows him out. But dating either of these individuals would not represent reality. Your student would be dating an altered version of their new "friend." An image, an un-real image. What happens when the buzz wears off? That real person will emerge and it might not be pretty.

So what's the big deal? Alcohol and drugs just make everything more fun, right? Not really. Because you wind up with way more than you bargained for: two personalities for the price of one. The problem is that you can't separate the two. Your student gets to date both at the same time... a split personality. They will end up trying to juggle two relationships at once — one medicated and one straight. Ask your student how they plan on breaking up with one and still keep the other. ("Jon is so much more patient after he has a bong hit in the morning, but he's a real grouch when he gets home from work.")

Drinking and drugs are a great way to artificially boost your personality. That drinker might very well be the life of the party. That stoner girl may become wildly romantic when she is altered. But it's a complete fake. The trouble for teens, and therefore the trouble for parents, is that teens do not see this as a bad thing. Neither do their friends. There seems to be little incentive to leave behind the personality they can only obtain by medicating. They *like* being altered. Or they are very attracted to someone who seems like the perfect companion after they've been using. To them it *is* the real thing. ("Andrew is so talkative when he does cocaine! Maybe if he did that in Mrs. Bevin's Science class, it wouldn't be so boring.") ("I love hanging out with Kayla when she's had a few. She's not nearly as negative about her life.")

Once an individual is clean and sober, reality sets in. Does your student recognize the stranger they have their arm around? Do

they even “like” the person they thought they were “in love” with? What is the benefit to spending time with someone who doesn’t even like himself unless he is altered? It’s like cheating on a test. The temporary gain might feel worth it at the time but then you spend an eternity trying not to get caught.



**What exactly is your date trying to make go away by medicating? You?**

The brutal fact is that drinking or doing drugs while you’re dating is a flat out lie. It creates an image, a false, temporary image of a person or of a life that is impossible to maintain. There’s a reason Marilyn Monroe was never photographed without her makeup.

In addition to keeping our teens safe from others who will act falsely or lie, let us not delude ourselves that our own teens will be 100% little angels and would never, ever use a prohibited substance. (Think back to your own growing up years.) A Breathalyzer is the ultimate lie detector. You can’t follow your teen around with a Breathalyzer, but you can stay on top of things. At our house, if our kids come home when we are asleep, the rule is they have to come in and wake us up with a kiss on the cheek. Mints and gum don’t cover up everything. If you suspect they are drinking or doing drugs, do a “random drug test.” When your teen comes home, surprise them by getting out of bed and having a “lights on face to face” conversation about their evening for at least five minutes. Trust me, you’ll know. And they’ll remember.

**Feelings**

When you drive a car in a video game, you use the same controls as you do in a real car: a steering wheel, an accelerator, a brake. All the same parts are there except for the sense of pain or consequence when you hit the wall. You know you can have spectacular crashes and never feel a thing. This is not how real drivers learn to drive real cars. If this were a viable way of teaching kids how to drive, don’t you think Driver’s Ed instructors would have used this method by now? Yes. It is not until there is real

fear and real danger that we pay attention to the potential harm that comes our way. When we're sober, we have a natural instinct that sends up red flags to warn us of danger. When you drink, you might as well leave the red flags at home.



### Model It...

**Play a racecar video game with your student. Speed and take the turns too fast until you crash and burn. Push the button and restart the race. Do it again and again. Crash and get up, crash and get up. Talk about how nobody gets hurt, nobody dies. Discuss the delusion of this skewed reality. Help your teen understand that when you're under the influence of any mind altering substance, you lose your sense of reality. Danger becomes a distant concept. Crashing into a wall at 100 might actually seem like fun.**

The reality is that being under the influence dulls the senses. There are reasons that there are laws against drinking and driving; you are unable to make good judgment calls. In fact, when you smash into that tree at 3:00 am, you might be so dulled against sensation that you don't feel a thing. Yet. Not until you wake up the next morning in traction with your leg in the air and your teeth in a glass.



**Do you want to be the passenger in someone else's video game?**

Drinking will deaden real feelings. Altered people are artificial. They are just a simulation of themselves. It's like falling in love with a computer generated character. You miss out on all the real feelings, conversations, and decisions in this life. Un-medicated you are forced to work through problems instead of avoiding, stuffing, or masking the issues that will absolutely

resurface once the temporary numbness has worn off. Like Novocain after a root canal. As painful as some of the feelings are, your student will have a better chance of coping if they learn to experience feelings and deal with them head on. There is really no good detour here.



### **Would you pour vodka in your gas tank?**

#### **Physical**

Many teens have no sense of their physical immortality. They are fearless, “bring it on” creatures with frontal lobes that are not fully developed that encourage them to bungee jump from train bridges in Mexico. They seem to have no concept that pouring alcohol into their own bodies is harmful. Yet, they would protect their precious vehicle from the same abuse.

Pouring alcohol in your fuel tank might sound ridiculous, but it makes a point. We know it would negatively impact the car. A drop or two may not make a huge difference, but an entire bottle could cause serious problems. Even though the working parts of a car are made of sturdy, high-grade metal, they are still too delicate to handle booze. The working parts of a teenager are even more sensitive and fragile, yet a teen would down a six-pack before he'd let you funnel one beer into his gas tank. A teen's perception of his mental and physical durability is twisted, especially when it comes to driving or dating under the influence. A teen might inflict damage to his or her body that they would never consider inflicting on their cars. How odd? How sad.



#### **Model It...**

##### **Medicated Math**

**Grab your calculator for this one! Ask your student to do the math.**

Here are the national IQ scale ranges for determining your intelligence level. There are several IQ Scales online. (This scoring table was found online by simply Googling "IQ Rating" and linking to [www.wilderdom.com](http://www.wilderdom.com)):

Over 140	Genius or almost genius
120–140	Very superior intelligence
110–119	Superior intelligence
90–109	Average or normal intelligence
80–89	Dullness
70–79	Borderline deficiency in intelligence
Under 70	Feeble-mindedness

Studies have shown that IQ drops as alcohol blood level increases. Assume you are average (just for this exercise). You have an IQ of 100. Each drink that you consume drops that number by 10%.

What happens to your IQ after two drinks? \_\_\_\_\_

After four? \_\_\_\_\_

After six? \_\_\_\_\_

The correct answer is = "My dream date is someone who is feeble-minded most of the time, but on good days is dull."

### **Fling**

Having a relationship with someone who drinks or does drugs is kind of like having an affair. You may see the public life but there is a completely different life in private when no one is looking. The drug or beverage of choice is their secret love. It is what consumes their world, their mind. Their public life becomes just a façade covering up the desire for them to be somewhere else or more accurately, *someone* else. How long can anyone sustain that lifestyle? Seasoned adults (sometimes *well*-seasoned) have proven over and over again that it can't be done. How in the world can

a teen be expected to manage? Why should a teen be expected to tolerate two people for the price of one? Managing any one relationship is a task that challenges even the most grounded and loving couples. Managing two at once is impossible. It won't be very long before trust is destroyed. Once trust erodes, the relationship is doomed, especially at this young age.



**Dating someone who drinks or does drugs is like double dating... alone.**

Excessive drinking and drugs blended into any relationship adds a very disturbing element. The concern is not for adults who drink responsibly. Instead, let's take a very realistic look at how the mental and emotional alteration takes its toll on our students. After all, how many teens begin the evening by drinking one glass of Chardonnay and then switch to water? Very few. Unfortunately, especially in these young, experimental years, teens indulge "to excess" and get stuck there. When you try to develop a relationship with someone, and then have to include a *third* party (drugs and alcohol), the chance of success is very small. Not only is the trio more complicated, but it becomes extremely difficult for someone to abandon the very thing they based their relationship on and start fresh. Too frequently the person they fell in love with in the beginning is gone, caput, vanished. Now, the dynamics of the relationship are unfamiliar, unacceptable, and typically unwanted.



**Mixing dating with drinking or drugs is like kissing on Novocain.**

When you're high, your perspective is distorted – about everything. Every aspect of a person (and a relationship) will be altered when you're under the influence: physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial. She's not really that cute. He's not really that funny.

When you're drunk and you're behind the wheel, you can't tell how far away that guardrail is. When you're in a relationship and you're drunk, you can't tell how far away your disaster is. But it is coming. Drinking and driving might land you in traffic court. Drinking and dating might land you in divorce court.

Getting high is a borrowed stimulation, and payback is brutal. Your student cannot afford the interest rate.

Kids have been warned about drinking and driving since they were old enough to read a billboard. Some ignore the warnings because of the thrill — because they are teens. They are immortal and untouchable. It's fun, it's risky, they might get caught... everything seems so attractive until they're on the floor of a jail cell worshipping a stainless steel Goddess without a lid.

Parents: do not let that stop you from trying to prevent this from happening. Love your kids enough to be the Meanest Mom on the Planet. You be Jane. You Jane. You tough. You want your kids alive and healthy.



### Drive It Home...

**DIA-LOG** with your student during the next 10 hours logged.

**Sober fun:**

Name three compelling reasons not to drink or do drugs:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**There are lots of safe, healthy ways to get high on life. You want a rush? Go on a rollercoaster. There is no good**

excuse for having to be chemically altered to enjoy your life. Be the real thing. See the real sights. Explore the options in your own backyard. Get your thrills from things you can do in public that won't get you arrested. Go kayaking, take Samba dancing lessons, go to a college ball game. The choices are endless. You've got a lot of life ahead of you and if you can't think of anything fun to do, maybe you should park your car in the garage and buy yourself a La-Z-Boy™.



### Road Trip...

**Student:**

Would you drive a car that had rat poison in the radiator? \_\_\_\_\_

Challenge yourself to find ways to have fun without drinking.

What three things do you do straight that you would classify as fun?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Name three things you have seen adults do without drinking that you would consider fun.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

List at least five ideas for an exciting adventure without drinking or drugs. Be creative.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



## Read Your Manual!



My girlfriend told me we couldn't afford beer anymore and that I would have to quit.

Then I caught her spending \$65.00 on makeup.

I asked her how come I had to give stuff up and she didn't?

She said she needed makeup to look pretty for me.

I told her that is what the beer was for.

I don't think she's coming back.

