

Does Heavy or Binge Drinking Really Affect Emotional Development?

It has been long believed that if someone starts drinking heavily or binge drinking that they are emotionally stuck at the age they began drinking. For example, if you started drinking at 16 and you are now 30, the belief is that you are emotionally managing your life as a 16 year old. This belief applies to other drugs of choice as well.

Whether you believe this or not, most people who go into recovery believe that they do not have the emotional or coping skills to manage their life and some of the inherent difficulties. Most people report starting to use or abuse substances as a teenager.

A teenager's brain is still developing and therefore very vulnerable to damage. Alcohol or drug use, whether daily or bingeing, can damage parts of the brain that effect behavior, learning, and remembering.

Teenager's report starting to drink and/or use to:

- Feel confident and secure
- Help overcome shyness
- Manage feelings of anxiety and depression
- Manage conflict
- Socialize easier
- Escape emotional pain
- Manage boredom and have fun
- Feel included
- Feel normal

Using alcohol or other drugs appears to "help" all of the above. It helps to "make everything better" because you don't have to deal with the real problem. It makes you believe that all your problems don't exist. Using helps the person live off the "high" or effects of the alcohol or drugs which allows them to not have to learn how to cope with these very real feelings and concerns. It gives you a false sense of handling your life. Instead of dealing with your concerns you drink or use which seems to make it all go away. You stuff the feelings down. Instead of trying to manage your life and relationships you avoid concerns because you don't have the skills to communicate how you feel or affectively work through problems.

Alcohol and drug use masks the real problems and therefore when you stop using you have to learn coping skills which may include:

- Communication
- Assertiveness
- Listening
- Managing anger
- Recognizing dysfunctional behavior in yourself and others
- Coping with difficult people
- Managing a healthy relationship
- Managing conflict

Learning to manage your life in a healthy way can be very challenging when you are use to drinking or drugging away your concerns. It takes trying new behaviors and taking risks that may be uncomfortable, such as telling someone how you feel instead of laughing it off or ignoring it. Ignoring how you feel just builds resentment and anger.

If you would like to learn more about managing life on life's terms please call the Lawyer Assistance Program for free, confidential assistance at 410-685 7878 x 3041 or toll free at 800-492-1964