


## Reducing Underage Drinking by Strengthening Social and Emotional Skills

Strengthening the social and emotional skills of youth reduces risky behaviors like underage drinking<sup>1</sup> and substance misuse in adulthood.<sup>2</sup> While most Montana youth are making healthy choices about not drinking alcohol,<sup>3</sup> the risks and negative consequences for youth who do use alcohol can be devastating. About one-third of Montana high school students report drinking alcohol in the past 30 days, 11% report driving after drinking alcohol, and 23% report riding with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.<sup>3</sup> These behaviors put students at risk of experiencing negative and long-term consequences. Negative consequences of underage drinking may include poor school performance, risky sexual behavior, legal problems, and social problems.<sup>4,5</sup> Further, underage drinking puts youth at risk of substance misuse as adults.

**People who start drinking before age 15 are six times more likely to become dependent on alcohol or abuse alcohol later in life than those who begin drinking at or after age 21 years.**<sup>4,6</sup> Strengthening the social and emotional skills of youth reduces risky behaviors like underage drinking<sup>1</sup> and substance misuse in adulthood.<sup>2</sup> Social and emotional development is the building of critical life skills. These social and emotional skills include understanding and managing oneself, relating to others, and making responsible choices based on self and others. More specifically, these skills include being able to recognize and regulate emotions, empathize and care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, establish and maintain positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors.<sup>7,8</sup>

Research showing the impact of social and emotional skills among youth populations is growing.<sup>9,10</sup> For example, a quasi-experimental, non-randomized, five-year longitudinal study was done to compare students who received a universal social and emotional training intervention with students who did not.<sup>1</sup> In the study, even though the social and emotional training intervention did not explicitly target substance use, there were statistically significant and favorable differences in substance use between students who received the social and emotional training and those that did not.<sup>1</sup> Another study examined whether kindergarten teachers' ratings of children's social and emotional skills predicted various youth and adult outcomes



including substance misuse.<sup>2</sup> Results found that while early social and emotional skills were not associated with alcohol dependence in early adulthood, they were correlated with binge drinking.<sup>2</sup>

Social and emotional skills can be taught to children, teens, and adults. They can be taught, practiced, and supported at home, in school, and in the workplace. Social and emotional skills are associated with improved behavioral outcomes such as fewer conduct problems,<sup>11,12</sup> lower levels of emotional distress,<sup>11,12</sup> and positive wellbeing.<sup>12</sup> Social and emotional skills are also associated with improved academic outcomes<sup>11,12,13</sup> and positive employment outcomes such as obtaining stable employment and being employed full time.<sup>14</sup> Strengthening social and emotional skills is likely to help youth reach their fullest potential<sup>11</sup> including the likelihood of reducing underage alcohol use<sup>1</sup> and the misuse of alcohol in adulthood.<sup>2</sup>

## References

- 1 Kimber, B., & Sandell, R. (2009). Prevention of substance use among adolescents through social and emotional training in school: A latent-class analysis of a five-year intervention in Sweden. *Journal of Adolescence*, 32(6), 1403–1413. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.10.005>
- 2 Jones, D. E., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(11), 2283–2290. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>
- 3 Kann L, McManus T, Harris WA, et al. (2016). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2015. *MMWR Surveill Summ*;65(No. SS-6):1–174.
- 4 Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). Fact Sheets – Underage Drinking. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/underage-drinking.htm>
- 5 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2007.
- 6 Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Rockville, MD; 2016.
- 7 Elias, M. (2007). What is social and emotional learning? Institute for Social and Emotional Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.instituteforsel.org/why-sel>
- 8 Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2018). What is SEL? Retrieved from <http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/>
- 9 Ross, K. M. & Tolan, P. (2017). Social and Emotional Learning in Adolescence: Testing the CASEL Model in a Normative Sample. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 00(0), 1-30. doi:10.1177/0272431617725198
- 10 Domitrovich, C.E., Syvertsen, A. K. & Calin, S. S. (2017). "Promoting Social and Emotional Learning in the Middle and High School Years." Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University. Retrieved from [http://prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/penn\\_state\\_middle\\_high\\_brief\\_final.pdf](http://prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/penn_state_middle_high_brief_final.pdf)
- 11 Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>
- 12 Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow up effects. *Child Development*, 88(4), 1156–1171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12864>
- 13 Zins, J., Bloodworth, M., Weissberg, R., & Walberg, H. (2007). The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success: *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 17, (2-3). 191-210. doi:10.1080/10474410701413145
- 14 Jones, D. E., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(11), 2283–2290. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2018). *Reducing Underage Drinking by Strengthening Social and Emotional Development*. (Research Summary). Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>



ParentingMontana.org was supported [in part] by CFDA 93.959 and 93.243 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0026-01-00, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and by the Montana State General Fund. The views and opinions contained do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, or the Montana Department of Health and Human Services, and should not be construed as such.