

# Knowing Our New Students: Strategies from Teen Drinking Cultures Research

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<http://teenalcoholcultures.gmu.edu>

*Funded by a grant from The Century Council*



# FOUNDATIONS

*The goal: understand the cultures surrounding teens and alcohol, with a focus on who and what might influence youth behavior. This will assist policy-makers, community leaders, and youth-serving organizations to fight adolescent drinking.*

*This project is unique as it incorporates a blending of cultural anthropology and public health approaches.*

*Culture: learned, socially patterned habits of thought and behavior characteristic of a group, but subject to change*



# SUMMARY OF ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- Understanding key influencers on youth decisions to consume/not consume alcohol
- Better understanding of youths' and parents' worlds regarding alcohol issues
- Recommendations about delivery of age-appropriate and key influencer messaging designed to impact – reduce – cultural acceptance of underage drinking



# ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES: Individual Level

- Assess the psychological and sociological ecosystems that affect adolescents as they make decisions and engage in behaviors associated with alcohol
- Understanding adolescent alcohol consumption/non-consumption:
  - Influences upon decision-making
  - What they drink
  - Patterns and types of consumption
  - Source of alcohol
  - Settings
  - Drinking/non-drinking motivations
- The context and reasons associated with early alcohol experiences
- Understanding the continuum of alcohol consumption behavior, from non-use, to use, to “getting wasted”



# ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES: Group Level

- The role of adults/parents in adolescent alcohol use
- The role of peers and friends in adolescent alcohol use
- Nature of acceptance/non-acceptance by parents, adults, school personnel, community leaders, peers
- Level of knowledge by various groups of individuals
- Factors associated with adolescents' "permission" to drink alcohol
  - How this has been granted
  - When this occurred
  - Who granted this permission
- Potential influences favoring future decisions to abstain



# Understanding Teen Drinking Cultures: **ADVISORY PANEL**

***Allan Y. Cohen, Ph.D.***

Co-Founder and Vice President

Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation

***Ron Geraci***

Senior Vice President

Nickelodeon Research

***Gerardo M. Gonzalez, Ph.D.***

Dean of Education

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Senior Research Associate

Institute for Scientific Analysis

***Mimi Nichter, Ph.D.***

Professor of Anthropology

University of Arizona



# RESEARCH STRATEGIES

*The methodology incorporated a blend of approaches, and involves the use of a national Advisory Panel.*

- Literature Review
  - 250 articles, 59 dissertations/theses, 34 government/non-profit reports, 19 books, 19 data sets
- Telephone Polling
  - 1623 interviews [1014 parents and 609 teens]
  - 522 are matched pairs [parent and teen]
- Key Informant and Individual Interviews
  - 58 completed [blend of community , school, law, and health]
- Expert Interviews
  - 28 completed [includes university, research, government, medical, and authors]



- Focus Groups [N=71]
  - 59 with youth [47 high school, 6 middle school, 6 college]
  - 8 with parents
  - 4 with community leaders
  - 513 youth were involved in focus groups
    - 396 high school and 35 middle school youth
    - High school youth were balanced with boys/girls and white/non-white
    - No notable differences were found based on race/ethnicity
    - Few differences were found based on gender
  - Sites included Northern Virginia, Bucks County (PA), Orange County (FL), Minneapolis, Santa Fe (NM), Northern New Jersey, and rural Georgia.
    - No notable differences were found based on setting (urban/rural/suburban)







Search:  GO

## UNDERSTANDING TEEN DRINKING CULTURES IN AMERICA



[Home](#)
[Background](#)
[Research Design](#)
[Project Leadership](#)
[Publications](#)
[Media Coverage](#)
[Resources](#)
[Contact Us](#)



### PROJECT NEWS

- [Literature Review of 250 Articles on Teen Drinking. Click Here.](#)
- [March 26, 2008: Press Release: The Century Council](#)
- [March 26, 2008: Press Release: George Mason University](#)

### Home

The "Understanding Teen Drinking Cultures in America" research project is designed to gain a greater understanding of teen drinking. Using a scientifically-grounded approach, this project will gain an understanding of the culture surrounding teens' use of alcohol. This project's ultimate focus is upon WHO and/or WHAT might influence future youth decisions to decline alcohol.

The research foundation and design represent an innovative strategy for understanding this issue. Blending both cultural anthropology and public health approaches, the research design incorporates multiple methodologies.

The target population is adolescents under age 18, incorporating primarily youth of high school and late middle school age. The aim is to gain a better understanding of cultural influences and messages in a complex environment, with a focus upon the U.S. culture.

Funded by a grant from The Century Council, this independent research is guided by project co-directors, research staff, and a distinguished Advisory Panel. The research will provide periodic reports and papers, and will generate foundations for strategic approaches for affecting youth decisions in the future.





### PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- [Literature Review](#)

- Literature Reviews
- Resources
- Publications

<http://teenalcoholcultures.gmu.edu>



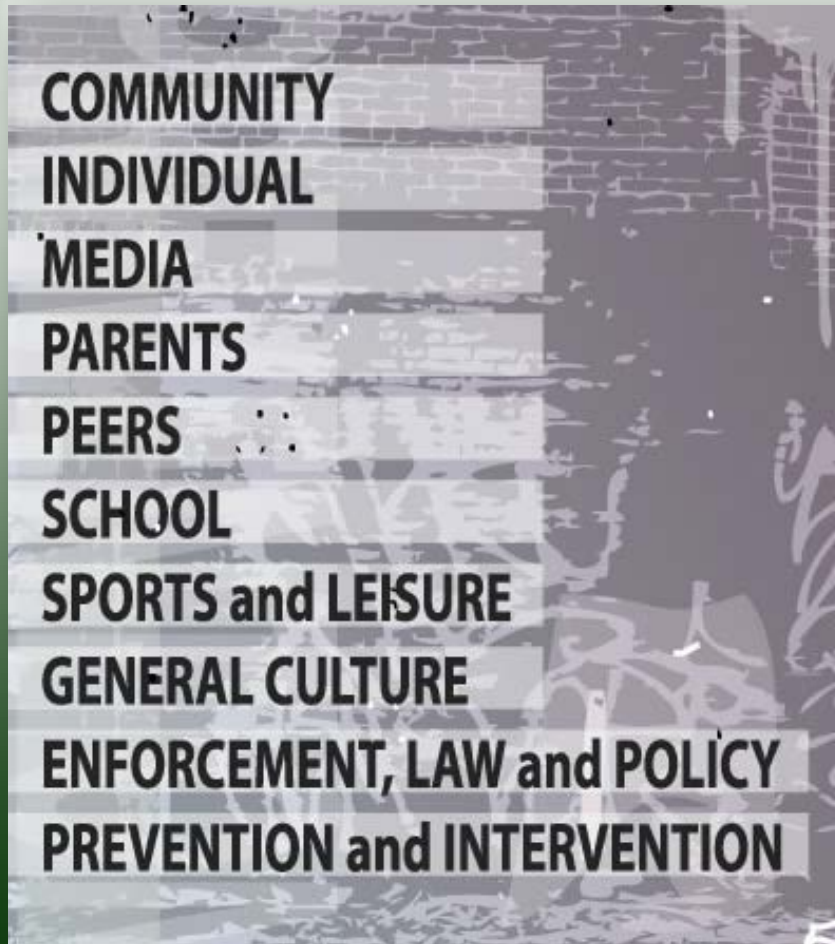
# LITERATURE REVIEW



- \* 2003-2008
- \* 250 Articles
- \* 10 thematic areas with summaries



# LITERATURE REVIEW



- Ten thematic areas
- Each area has a brief summary of highlights



# META FINDINGS

- Inadequacy of Current Knowledge
  - Much current knowledge is based on survey research.
  - Limited conversational research is found with teens, parents or other front line personnel.
  - Current expert knowledge is often limited.
- Disjunction Between Formal and Informal Rules
  - Teens and parents have their own practices and beliefs about what is practical and appropriate.
  - These practices and beliefs often diverge sharply from legal codes.





## META FINDINGS (cont'd)

- Differences Between Parent and Teen Views
  - Teens cite academic challenges more often than parents.
  - Teens are more likely to cite emotional or social reasons for drinking and for getting drunk.
  - Parents attach more importance to family relationships as motivators for teens' drinking or not drinking.
- Extreme Teen Behavior
  - Teens engage in high risk drinking behaviors on a frequent basis.
  - Teens who drink do so for emotional and social reasons.

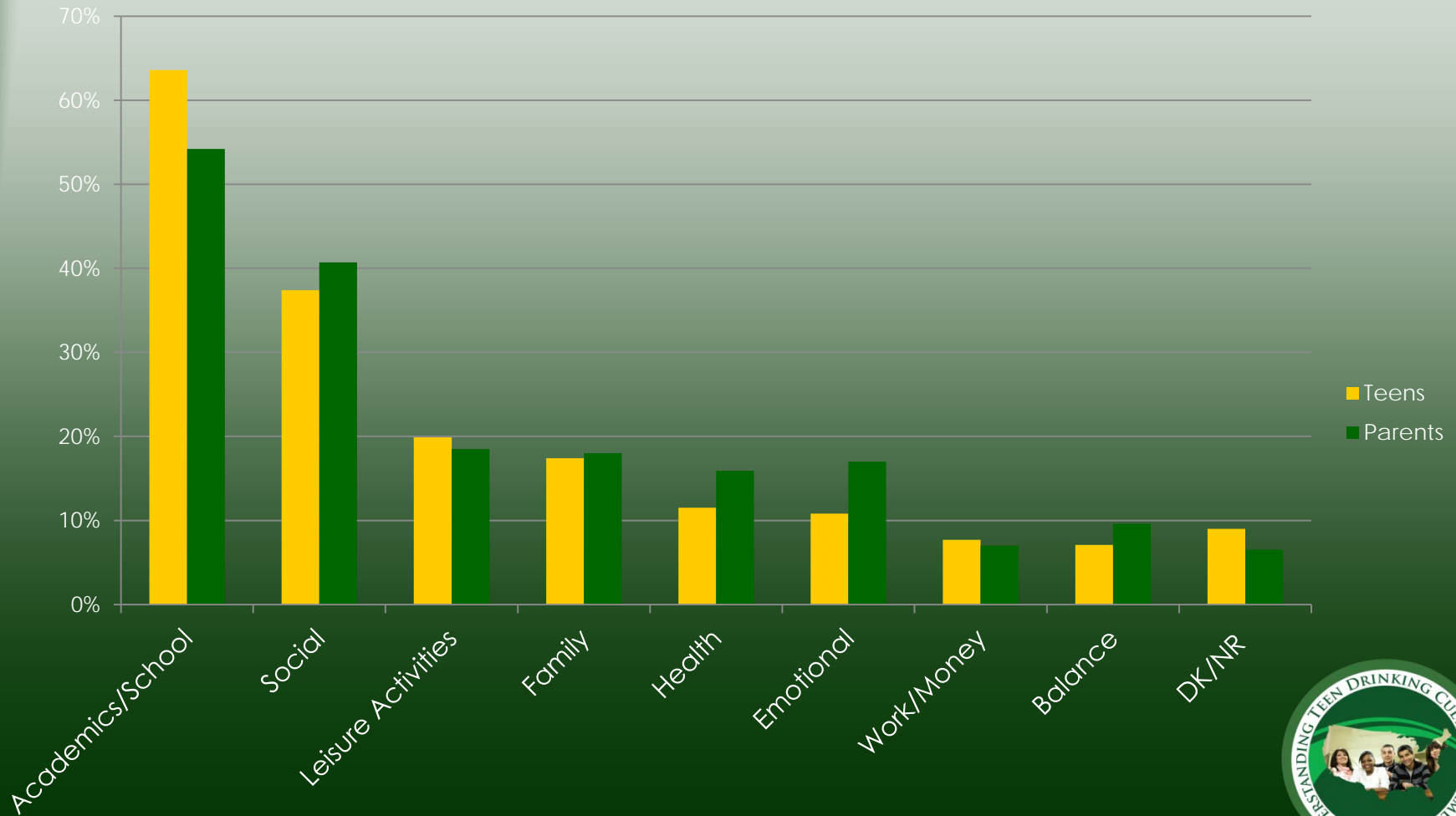


## META FINDINGS (cont'd)

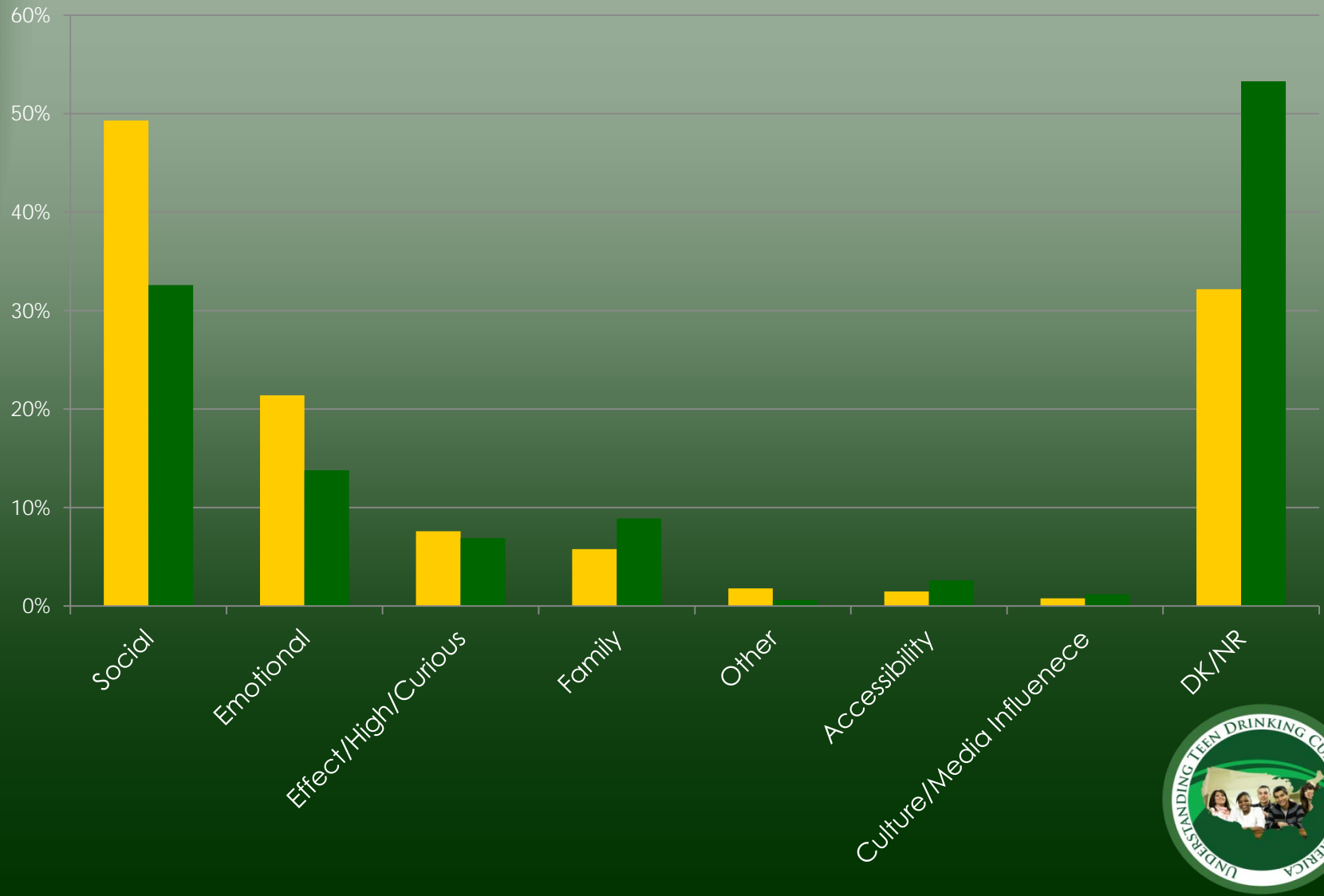
- Lack of Helpful Information
  - Teens have minimal knowledge of alcohol's effects (beyond drinking and driving consequences).
  - Teens and parents are unaware of helpful resources.
  - Teens and parents lack skills for meaningful dialogue on alcohol.
  
- Not Sure What to Do
  - Parents and community leaders are unsure how to address teen drinking.
  - Parents and community leaders focus primarily on policy or law enforcement approaches.



# TELEPHONE POLLING: Challenges Facing Teens

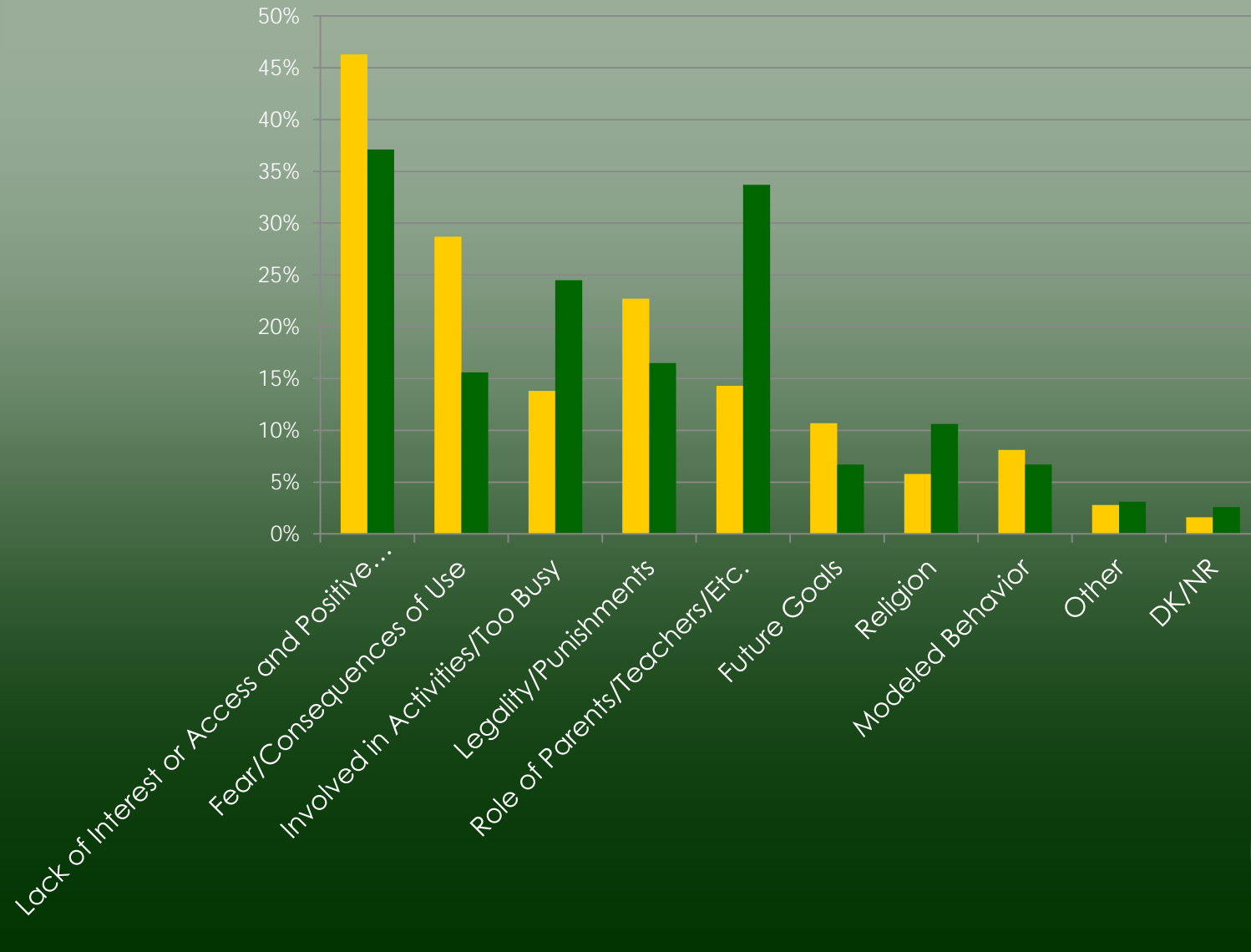


# TELEPHONE POLLING: Reasons Teens Drink Alcohol

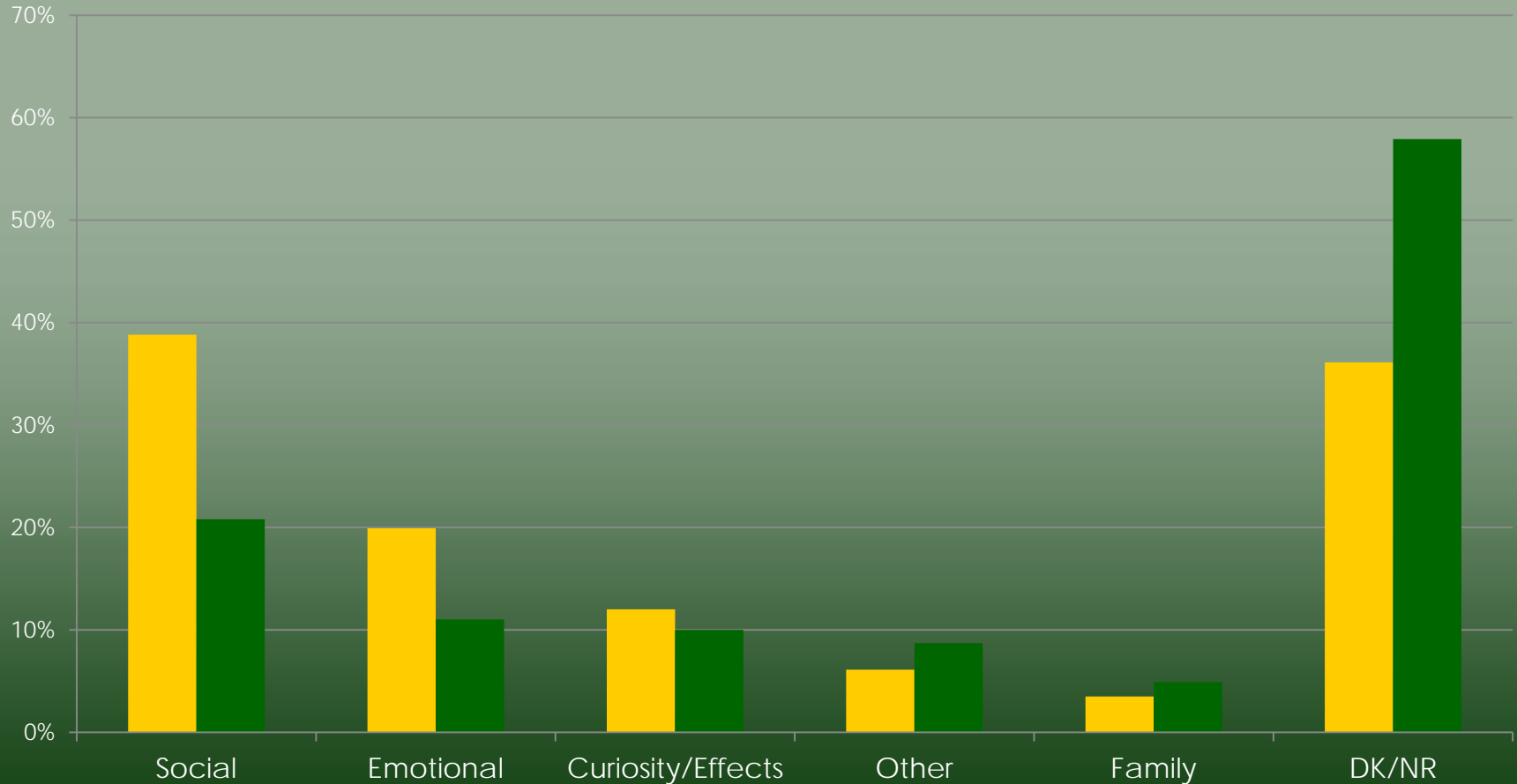




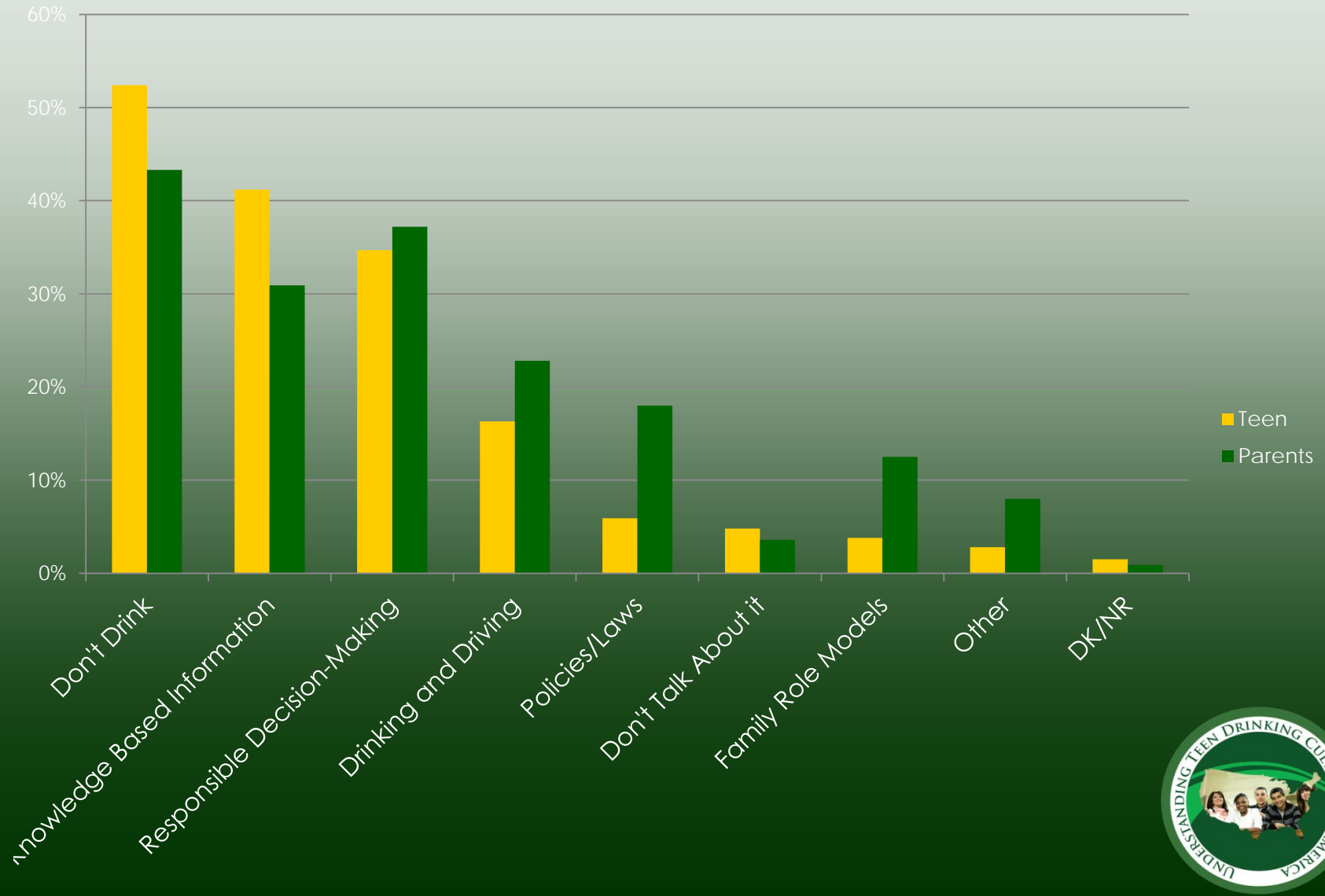
# TELEPHONE POLLING: Reasons Teens Do Not Drink Alcohol



# TELEPHONE POLLING: Reasons Teens Get Drunk

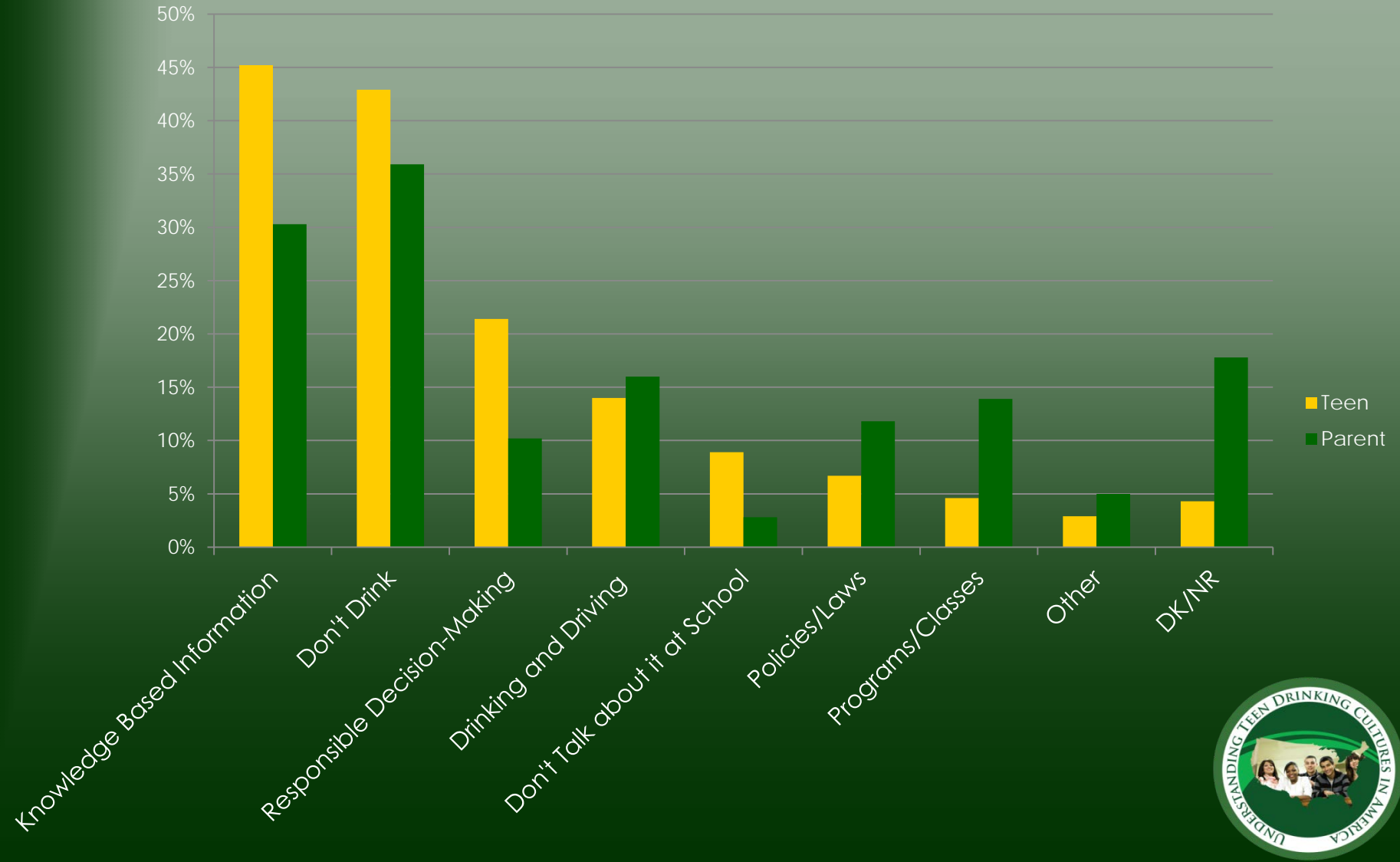


# TELEPHONE POLLING: Messages Heard From Parents

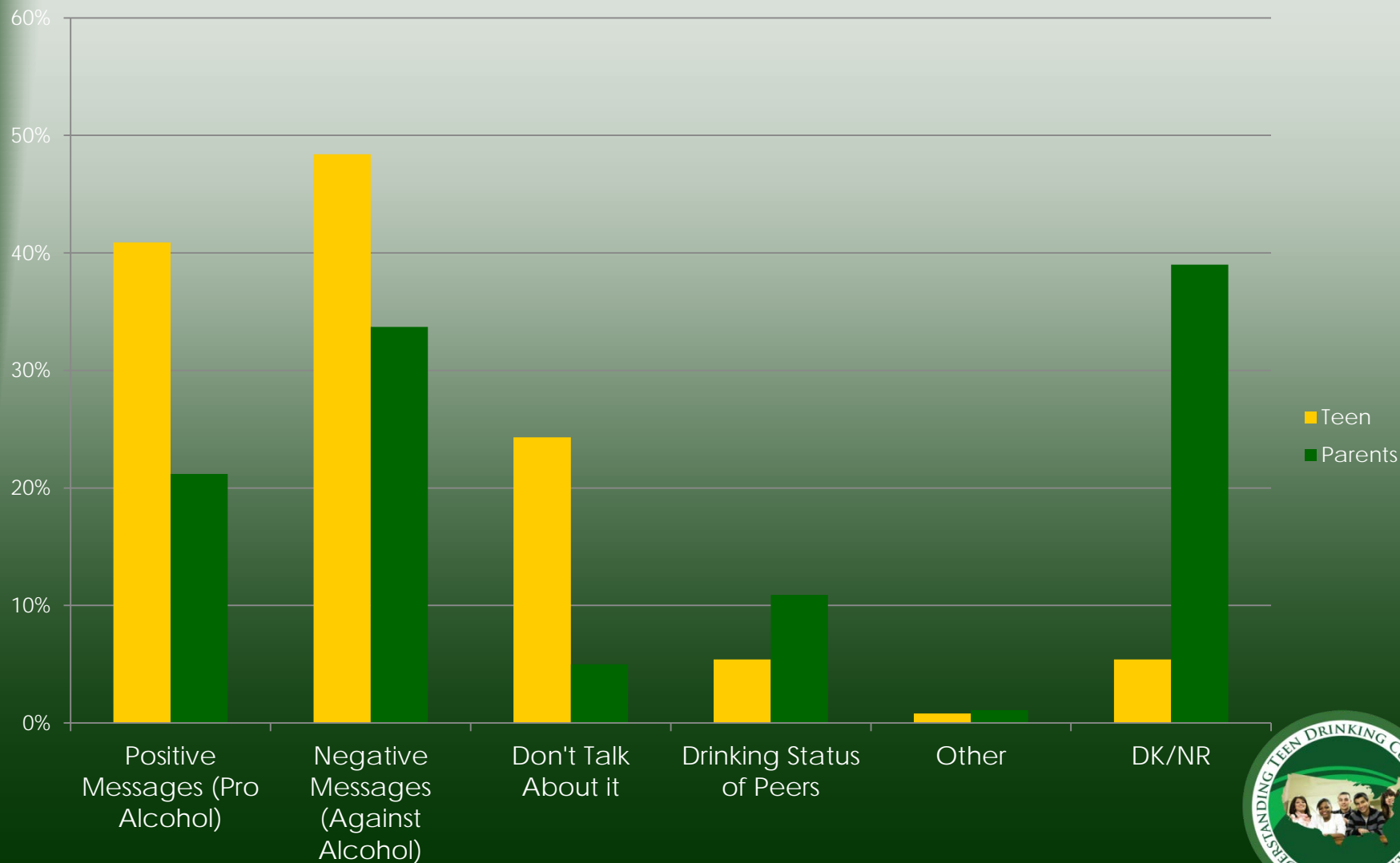


# TELEPHONE POLLING:

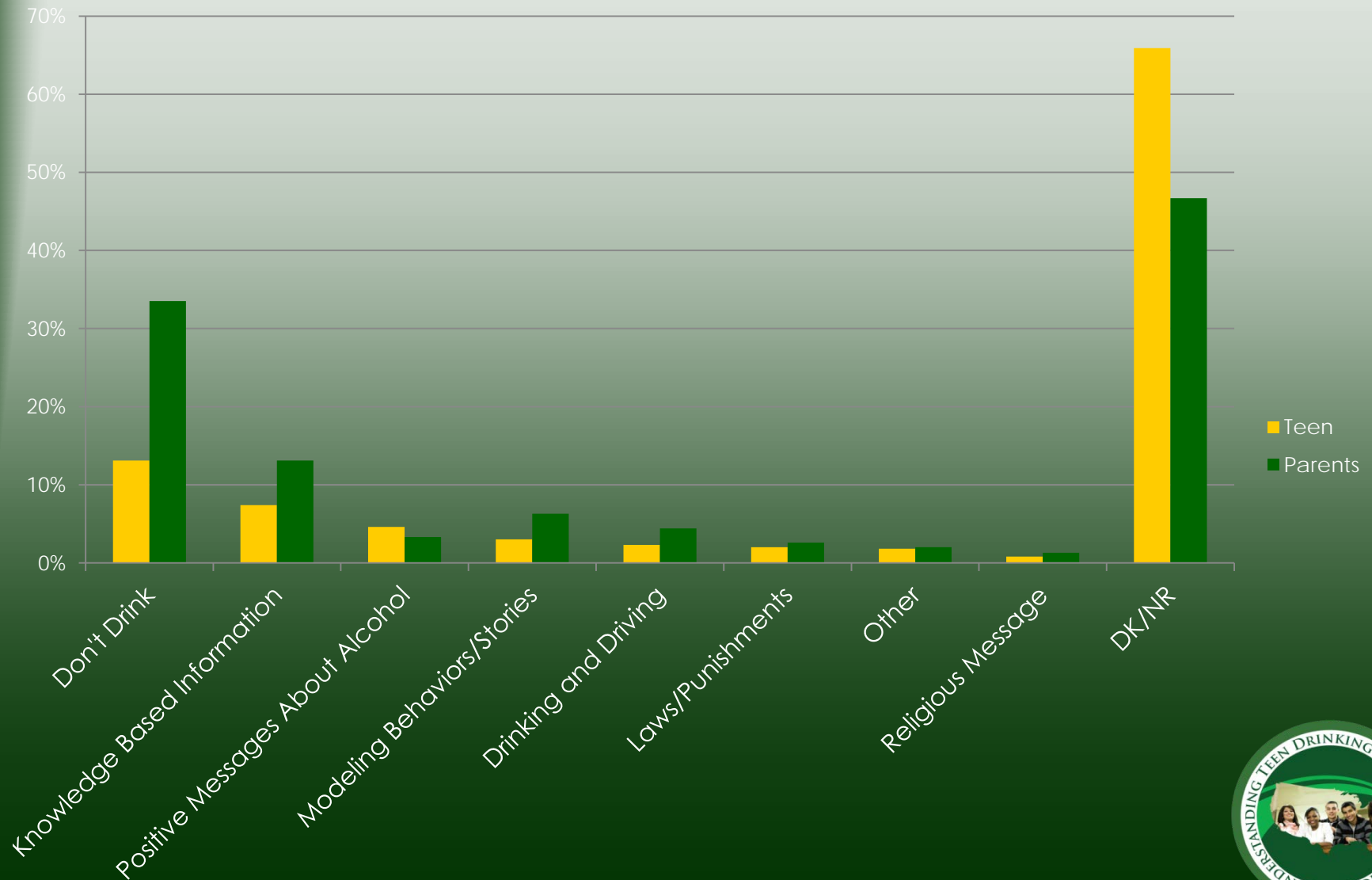
## Messages Heard From Teachers/Counselors



# TELEPHONE POLLING: Messages Heard From Peers



# TELEPHONE POLLING: Messages Heard From Others



# TEEN DRINKING BEHAVIORS

- Teens report that obtaining alcohol is quite easy, through relationships (older siblings, friends, co-workers), places of purchase, theft or party settings.
- Unlike other studies, our middle school teens report having few to no experiences with alcohol.
- Boys are typically expected to provide alcohol for girls.



# TEEN DRINKING BEHAVIORS

- Teens drink primarily to get drunk; drinking for taste or mild effects is rare.
- Teens drink to deal with stress, to facilitate group membership, and to feel better.
- Teens' transition to high school is a high-risk time.





# TEEN DRINKING BEHAVIORS

- Early drinking experiences are frequently dangerous “trials by fire” where teens learn by experimentation.
- While youth are aware of family and legal consequences, they are often confident that they will not get caught.



# Categories of Teen Drinking



# PARENTS

- Parents are often unsure how to talk to their teens and to other parents about teen alcohol consumption.
- Parents feel a lack of information and guidance.
- Parents are aware of the divergence between legal codes and informal practices.
- Public moralism and zero tolerance laws make frank conversation with their teen(s) and other parents difficult.



# PARENTS

- Parents are four times as likely as teens to think that alcohol education programs, such as those at school, are effective.
- Parents believe that schools emphasize informational and legal messages, including
  - don't drink
  - alcohol affects your health
  - don't drink and drive
  - alcohol use is illegal under 21
- Teens report limited to no conversations on alcohol with parents during teen years.



# TEENS

- Teens want more information about alcohol.
- Teens want judgment-free information about alcohol from sources they can trust; they do not trust school-based education programs.
- Most teens report that alcohol is talked about by school authorities, and report informational, legal and proscriptive messages.
- Whatever their actual behavior, teens report hearing and respecting messages about not drinking and driving.



# TEENS

- Teens typically don't see drinking as a problem, unless they get in trouble with those in authority.
- Teens see other teens' drinking as more of a problem than their own, even if the behavior is essentially the same.
- Teens overwhelmingly deny the importance of peer pressure in decisions to consume or not consume alcohol.
- However, teens have a poorly developed concept of peer pressure.
- Teens see drinking as pleasurable and often essential to socializing with other teens.
- For many teens, drinking is a primary extracurricular activity.



# FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH POSITIVE ALCOHOL DECISIONS

Underlying or Core Factors	Intrinsic or Vital Factors	Extrinsic Factors	Contextual Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Strong core values</li> <li>*Feel connected to past and future</li> <li>*Has a sense of purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Family bonds</li> <li>*Feeling loved and listened to</li> <li>*Feeling capable (confidence)</li> <li>*Aware of areas of concern</li> <li>*Knows where to turn for assistance</li> <li>*Feels supported</li> <li>*Has balance in life</li> <li>*Good coping skills to deal with anxiety, stress, high expectations</li> <li>*Friends provide support</li> <li>*Friends encourage behavior change as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Spend family time together</li> <li>*Healthy family</li> <li>*Has open communication / conversation with parents</li> <li>*Has meals with families</li> <li>*Has good sense of personal boundaries</li> <li>*Feels affirmation</li> <li>*Has clear and reasonable expectations</li> <li>*Skills to interact with others</li> <li>*Sees parents as partners and guides</li> <li>*Reflect on self</li> <li>*Has positive role models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Engaged in activities, clubs</li> <li>*Has opportunity to learn by doing, experiment, make mistakes</li> <li>*Is encouraged to stretch and extend comfort zone</li> </ul>
The Teen's World		The Role of Alcohol	



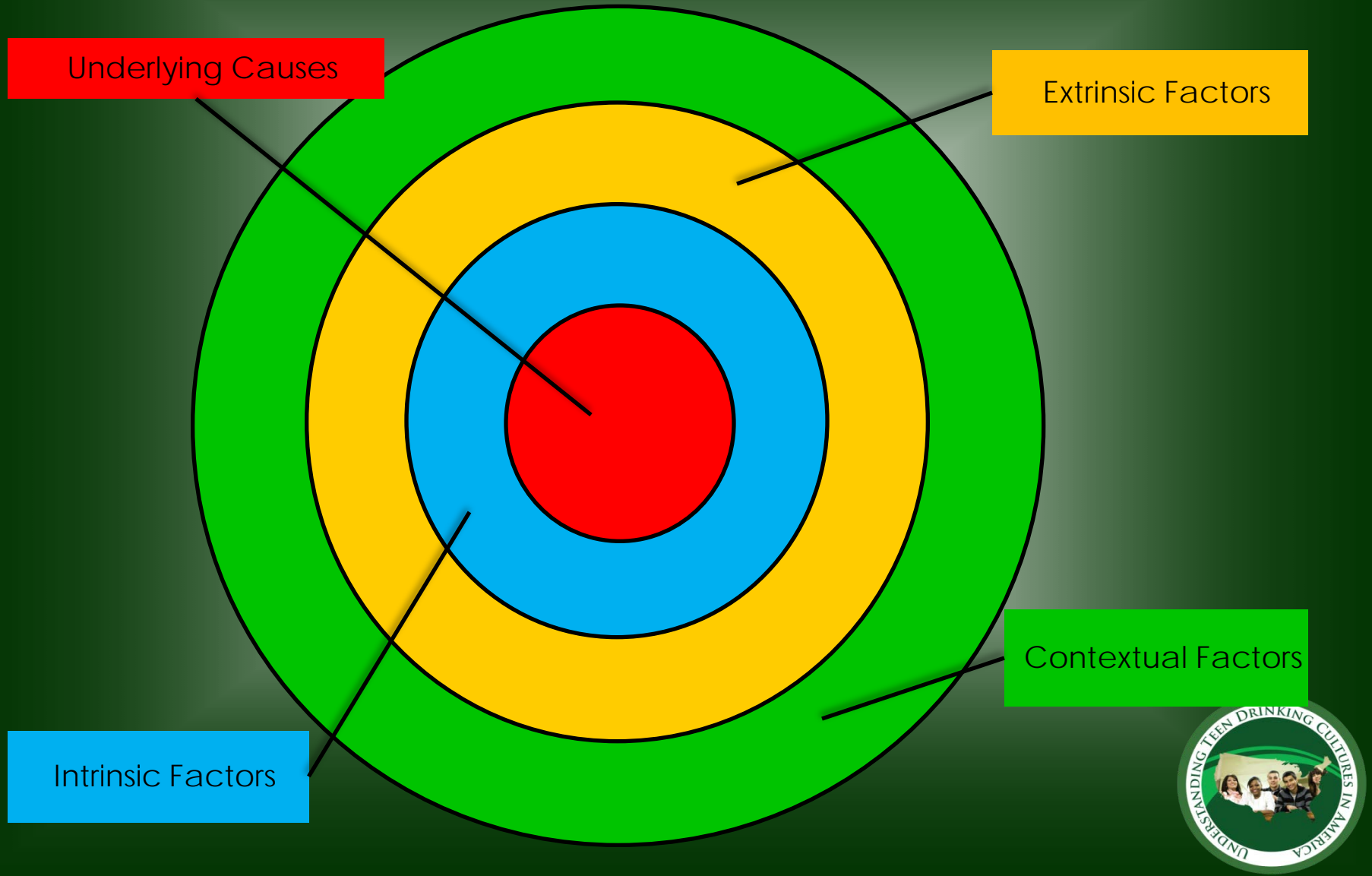
# FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH RISKY ALCOHOL DECISIONS

Underlying Causes	Intrinsic Factors	Extrinsic Factors	Contextual Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Stress</li> <li>*Feel pressure</li> <li>*Discouragement</li> <li>*Disenfranchised</li> <li>*Lonely</li> <li>*Seeking own identity</li> <li>*Insecure</li> <li>*Hopelessness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Lack coping skills</li> <li>*Boredom (nothing to do)</li> <li>*Not comfortable being alone</li> <li>*Lack of goals or mission</li> <li>*Escape</li> <li>*To experience things themselves</li> <li>*No reflection</li> <li>*To fit in</li> <li>*To be older</li> <li>*To rebel</li> <li>*Unrealistic expectations (life, situations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Lack knowledge and information</li> <li>*Lack meaningful conversation with parents</li> <li>*Lack of role models</li> <li>*Allure (TV, songs, ads)</li> <li>*No substantive, consistent legal consequences</li> <li>*Conflicting messages (adults drink)</li> <li>*Educational dishonesty, inadequacy, mistrust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Peer acceptability</li> <li>*Peers' encouragement</li> <li>*Ease of access</li> <li>*Party availability</li> <li>*Alcohol is readily available</li> <li>*Societal acceptability</li> </ul>
The Teen's World		The Role of Alcohol	

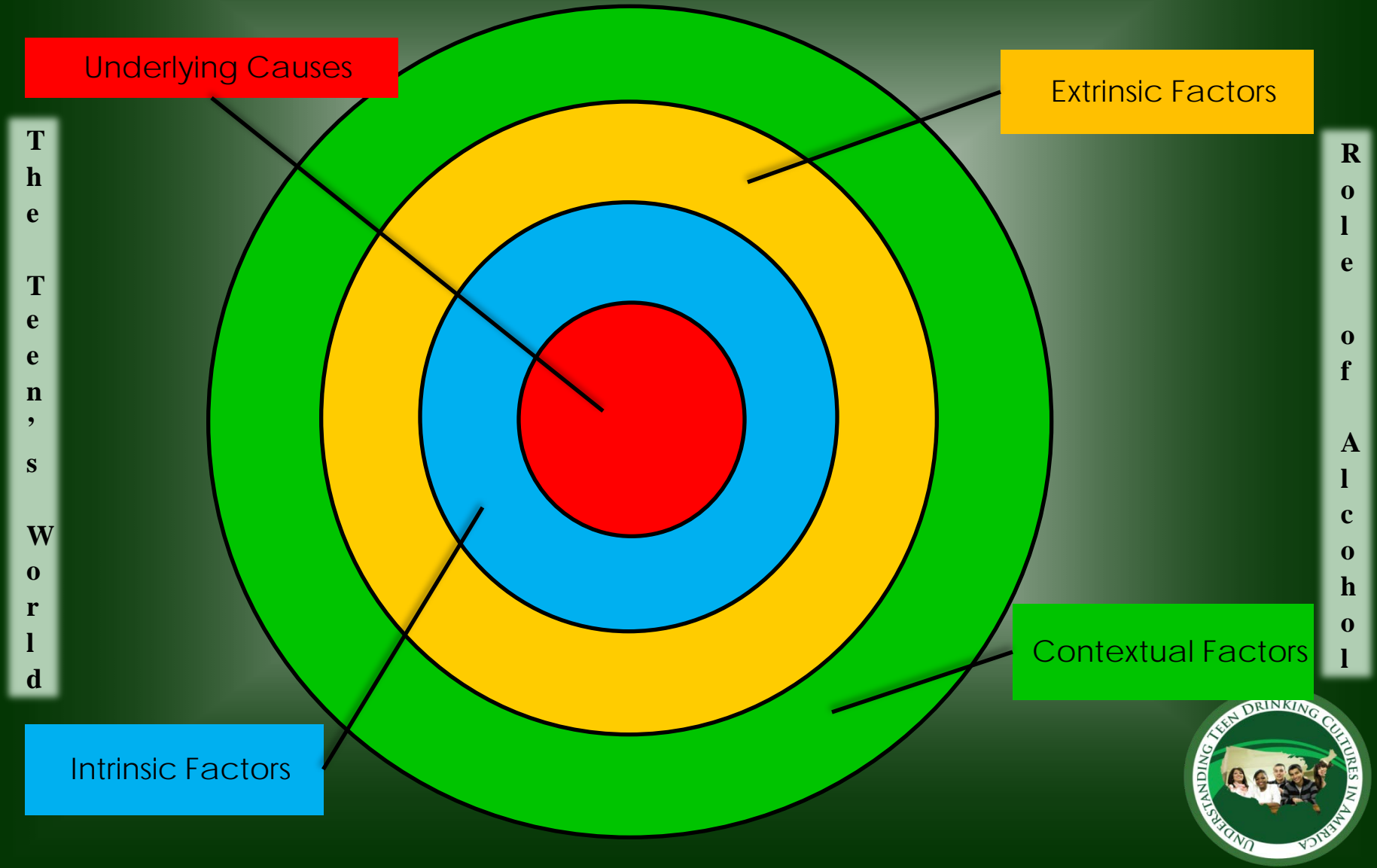




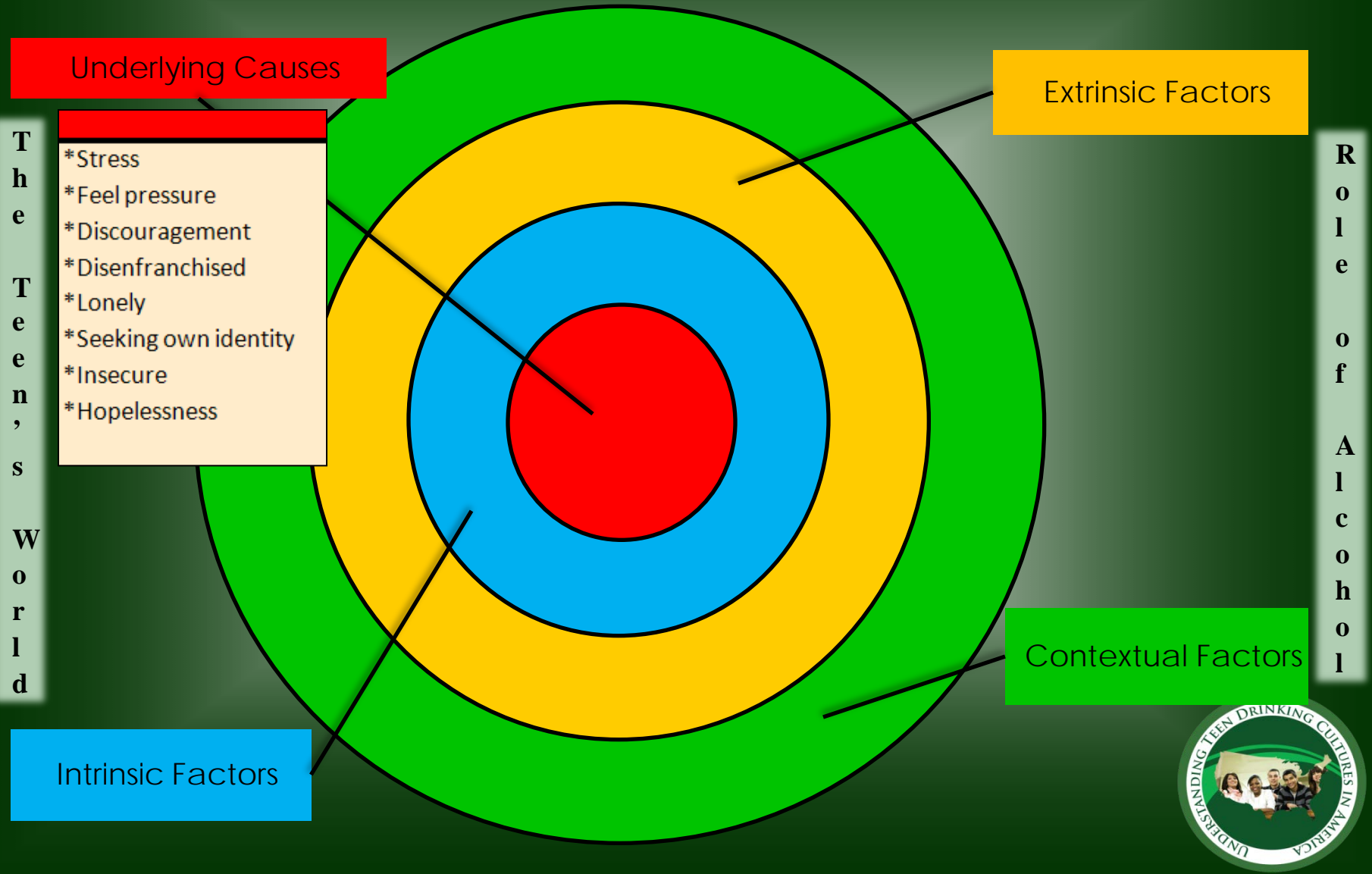
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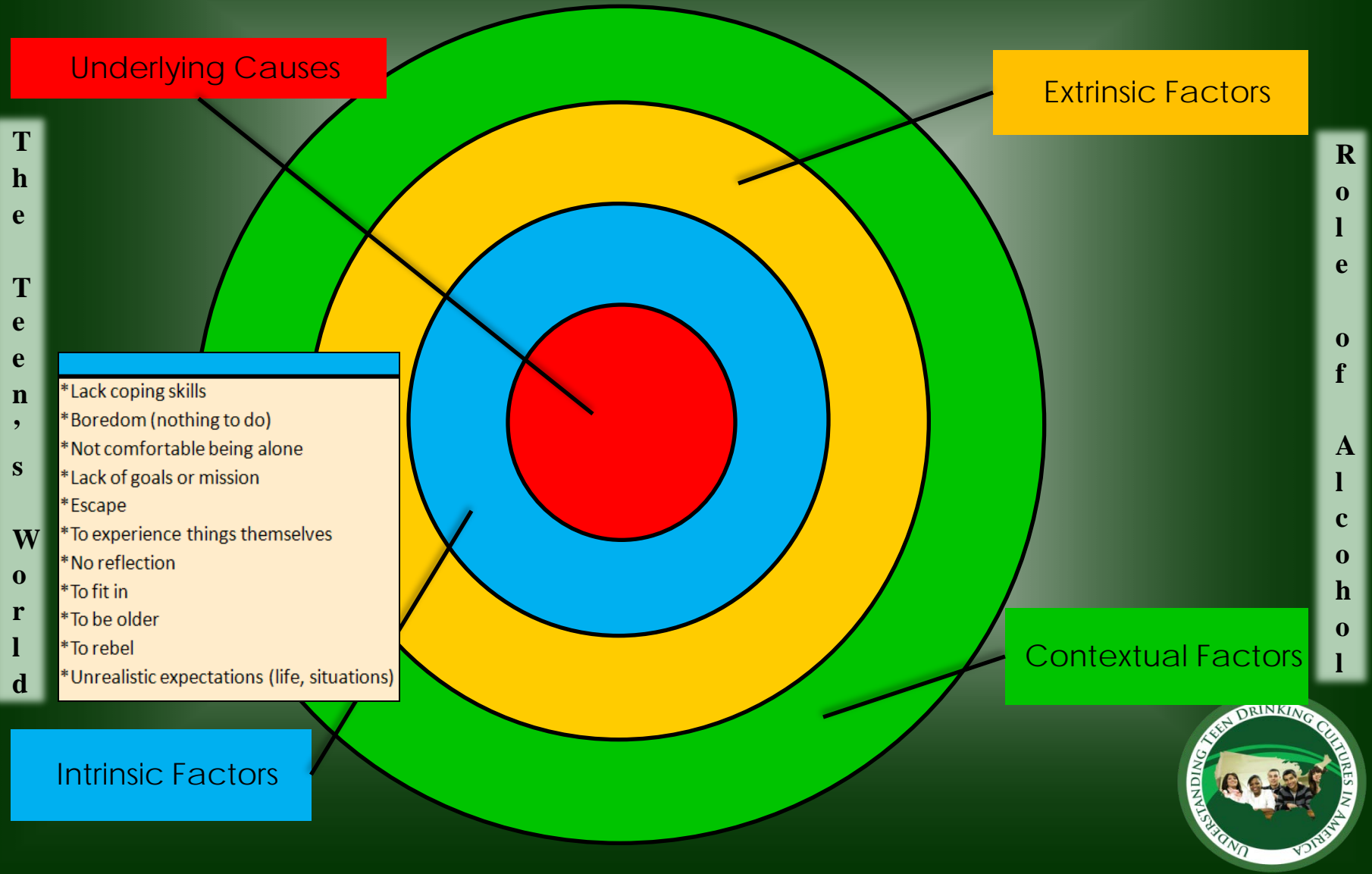
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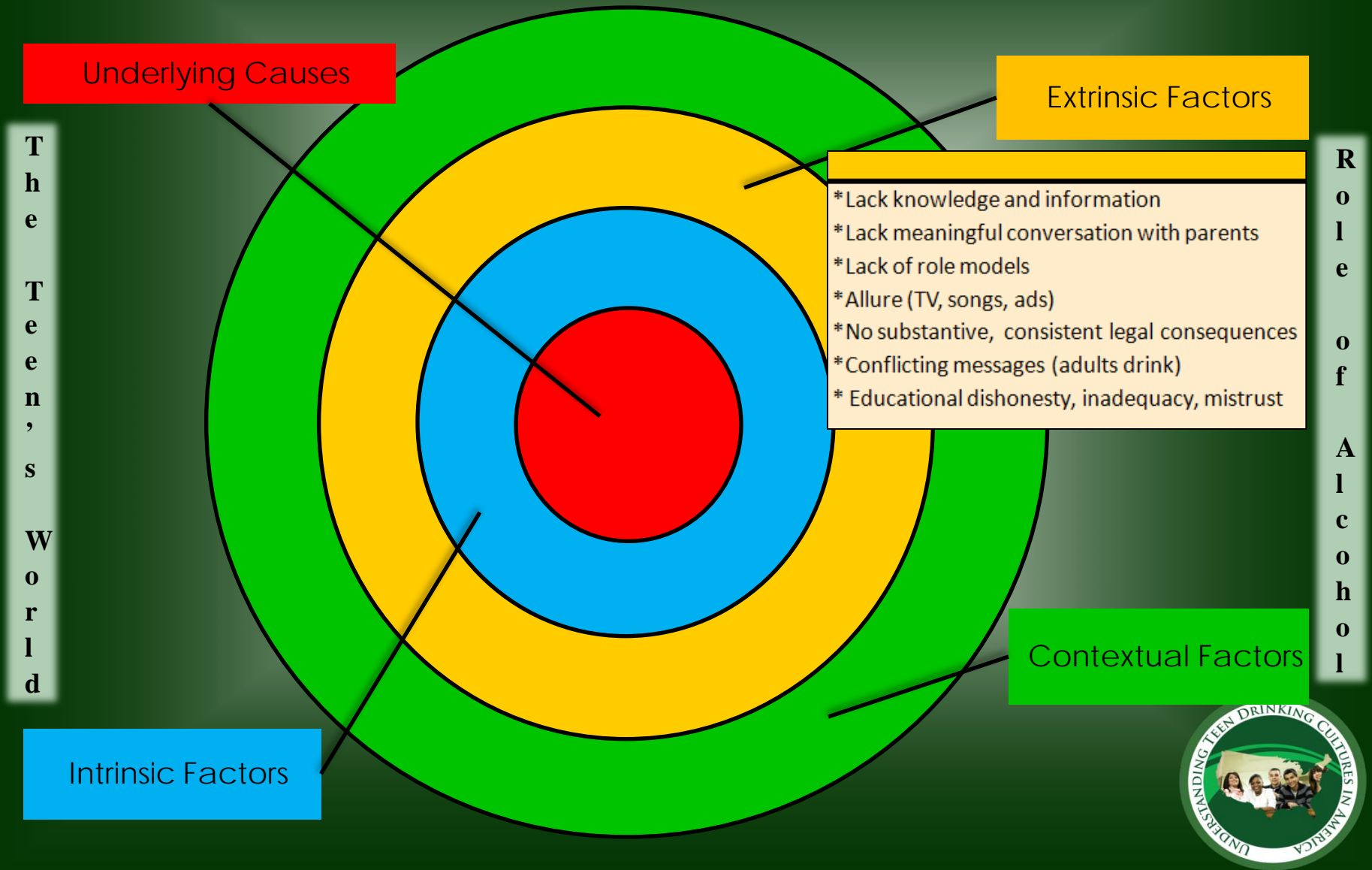
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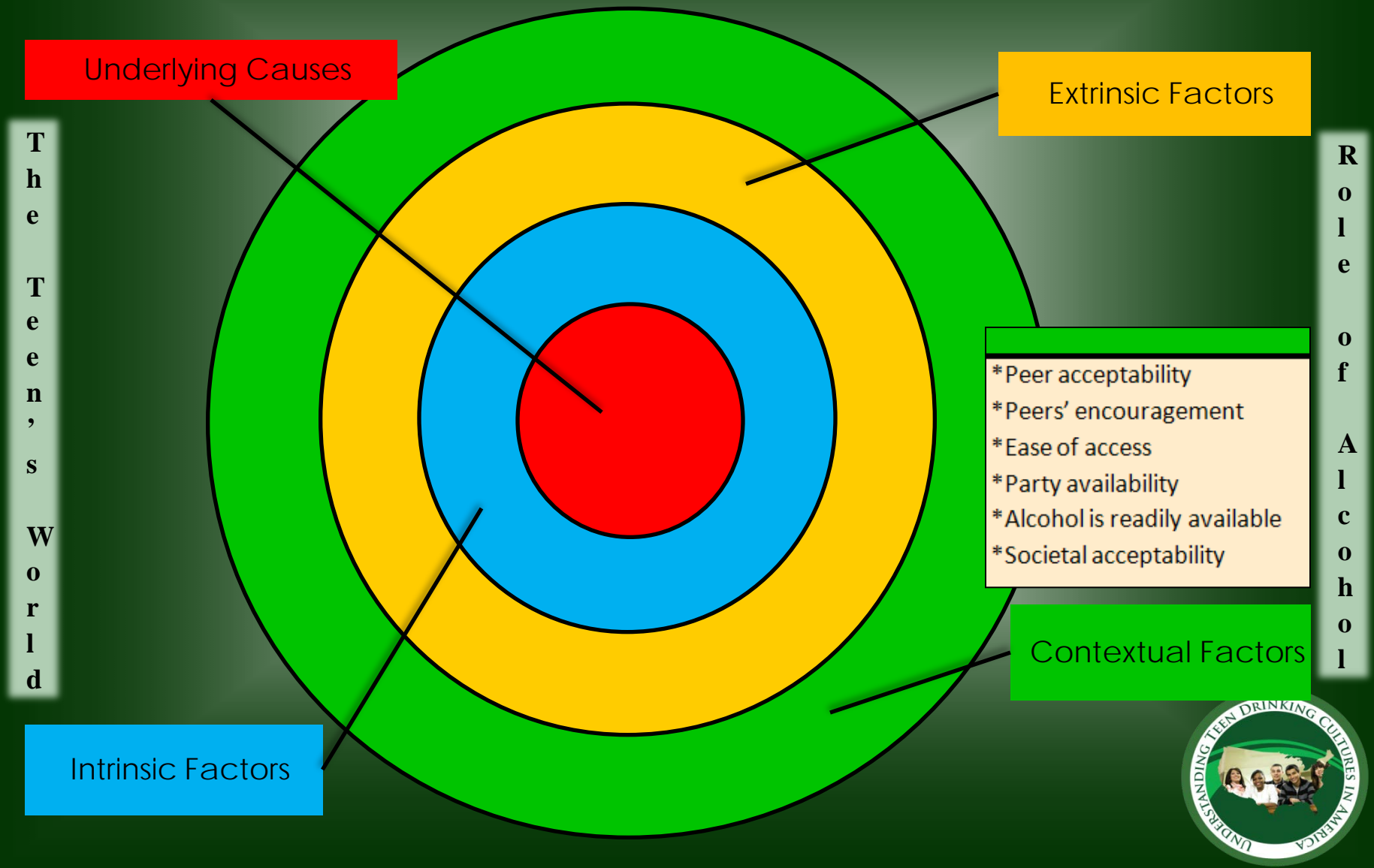
# FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH RISKY ALCOHOL DECISIONS



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# FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

		TYPE OF EFFORT			
		Policy	Program	Training	Environment
GROUP OR ORGANIZATION	Schools	Consistently implemented rules and regulations Standards for school employees and visitors	Curriculum that is meaningful Clubs and organizations After school activities	Personnel preparation with identification and referral	School bonding and community-building activities Recognition for positive contributions
	Law Enforcement	Laws and policies throughout the community Enforcement of laws	Sponsor local events Participate in community activities	Mentoring youth	Community resource officers in school and community settings
	Health Services	Services available for teens	Public awareness materials Community forum and dialog	How to identify problematic use How to be supportive	Promote as trusted source Spokespersons
	Community	Standards and guidelines	Community forum and dialog	Prepare adults and community leaders to understand today's youth needs Group meeting behavior	Volunteering for community events Public awareness activities
	Youth-Serving Organizations	Engage in establishing community policies	Community-wide activities	Mentoring opportunities for older teens	Provide awards for positive contributions

# Understanding Teen Drinking Cultures

## CHALLENGES

- Focus groups: Difficulty identifying site coordinators to provide leadership and handle logistics with coordinating multiple focus groups and interviews.
- Access to Youth: Reaching youth faces roadblocks from gatekeepers.
- Human Subjects Review Board: Requests for protocols require reworking design (e.g., Initial refusal to allow recruitment through schools, need for approval from each school for focus groups, concern about use of incentives, need for approval of each referring organization for on-line polling, limits on certain open-ended questions with telephone polling, initial requirement for written consent from parent for telephone polling)
- Timelines: Changing standards and delayed reviews from HSRB affects schedules and plans.
- Multiple approaches: More sequential scheduling of strategies would assist ongoing refinement of research questions; difficult within limited time frame.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are prepared within each of the following areas of emphasis:

- Youth
- Parents and Families
- Communities and Schools
- Future Research
- Overall



# RECOMMENDATIONS: YOUTH

- Engage youth in a meaningful way in planning extracurricular activities, information needs, learning experiences.
- Address the core needs of youth, with attention to underlying causes and intrinsic factors.
- Provide opportunities for youth to discuss their needs, concerns, and other issues.
- Provide teens with factual information about alcohol and its interaction with the body.
- Enroll older siblings as part of the solution.



# RECOMMENDATIONS: PARENTS and FAMILIES

- Provide opportunities for parent-to-parent discussion of dilemmas and challenges.
- Promote trust and ongoing dialog with teens about their lives.
- Provide parents and older siblings with current, accurate information and resource assistance.
- Enhance parents' skills and confidence for having ongoing conversations with teens about alcohol, consequences, and underlying causes.
- Encourage parents' and older siblings' skills and responsibilities.



# RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMUNITIES and SCHOOLS

- Community leaders should prepare a community-wide strategy that engages all partners through a systems approach, and incorporates appropriate benchmarks to monitor progress.
- Community leaders should seek heightened priority of teen alcohol issues and underlying causes, with increased visibility and attention.
- Communities and schools should provide a range of positive outlets for youth involvement and engagement.
- Community leaders should identify modes of access to alcohol used by youth and implement consistent standards and consequences.



# RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMUNITIES and SCHOOLS (continued)

- Engage various individuals and groups as communicators or sponsors of teen alcohol abuse prevention messages.
- Establish opportunities for dialog about teen drinking.
- Schools should provide curriculum material or extra-curricular programming on alcohol that is honest, provocative, engaging.
- Incorporate content on alcohol and related issues in a range of courses offered in school.
- Host life skills development sessions for youth and parents.
- Identify partnership opportunities.



# RECOMMENDATIONS: RESEARCH

- Facilitate additional qualitative research on teen alcohol cultures by a range of individuals/groups.
- Review community-based efforts, organizing strategies, monitoring approaches.
- Examine curricular materials and methods.
- Examine messages youth hear on drinking alcohol.
- Explore the role of athletics, service activities, and other extracurricular activities in youth decisions about alcohol.



# RECOMMENDATIONS: RESEARCH (continued)

- Research in more detail the four categories of teen alcohol behavior.
- Better understand the role of and opportunities with older siblings in youth decisions.
- Conduct a detailed systems analysis of one or more communities regarding alcohol culture.
- Gain more detailed understanding of youth knowledge about alcohol, its effects, and decision-making factors.



# RECOMMENDATIONS: RESEARCH (continued)

- Investigate the relationship between teen drinking and religious affiliation.
- Further investigate social hosting practices.
- Examine consistency regarding alcohol issues within households.
- Better understand teens' use of alcohol with prescription drugs.





# RECOMMENDATIONS: OVERALL

- Maintain a perspective that understanding youth alcohol decisions is very complex, based on both the Youth Alcohol Decision Frameworks.
- Engage key influencers of youth, particularly those who could be mentors.
- Embrace affirming and fact-based approaches.
- Maintain a perspective that changing teen drinking cultures is attainable and appropriate.



# Healthy Transitions to College: Understanding Teen Drinking Cultures Helps Promote Safety and Sound Foundations for Student Success

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