

# **UNDERSTANDING HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR IN TEENAGERS**

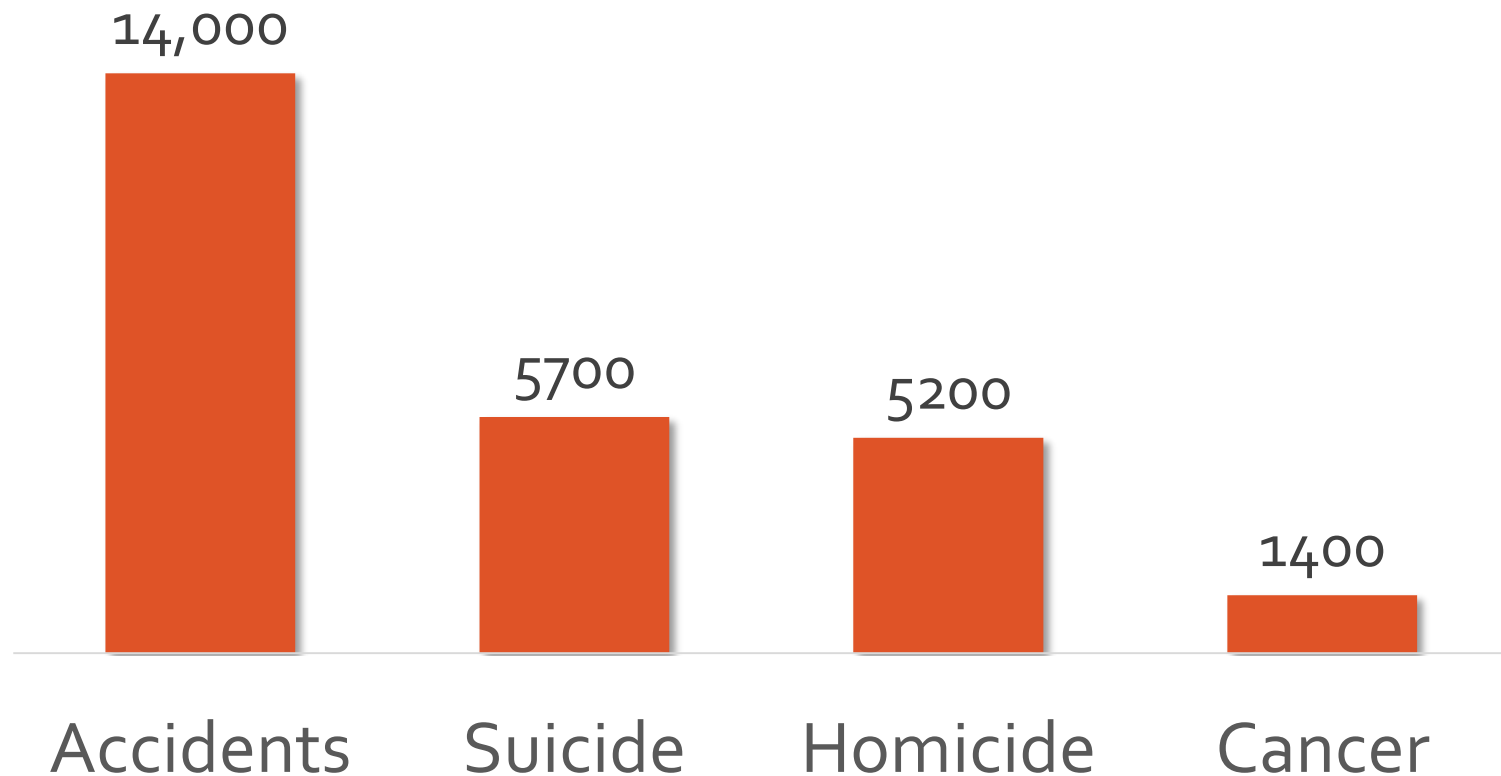
How clinicians, parents, and teenagers  
can collaborate to save young lives

Dale Wisely  
dalewisely@gmail.com

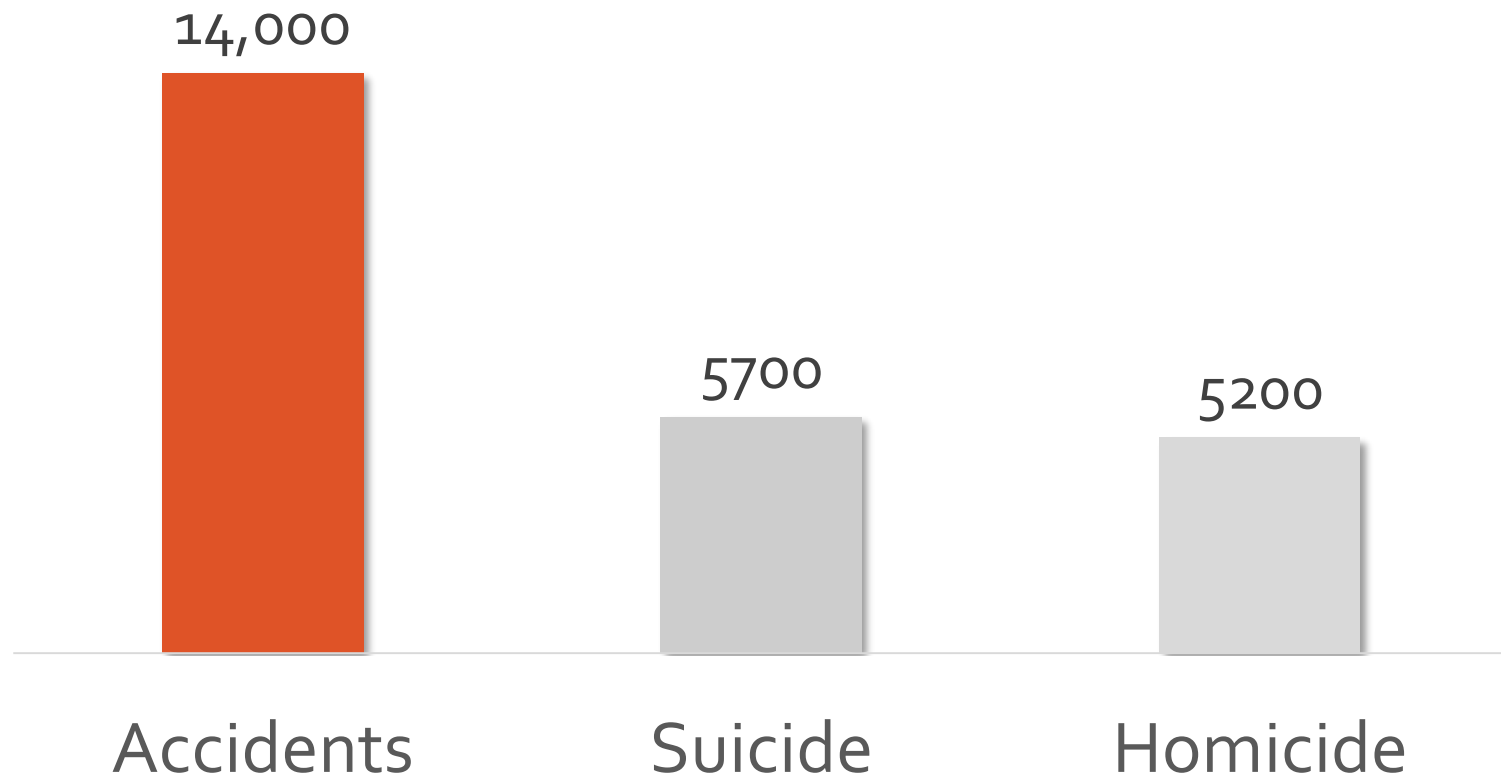
# The Deal This Morning

- i. Risks to Teenagers / High-Risk Behavior
- ii. Trends in Selected High-Risk Behavior
- iii. There is Nothing Wrong with the Teenage Brain
- iv. Factors Contributing to High-Risk Behavior
- v. EXIT STRATEGIES: A Proposed Parenting Program for Protecting Teenagers from High-Risk Behavior

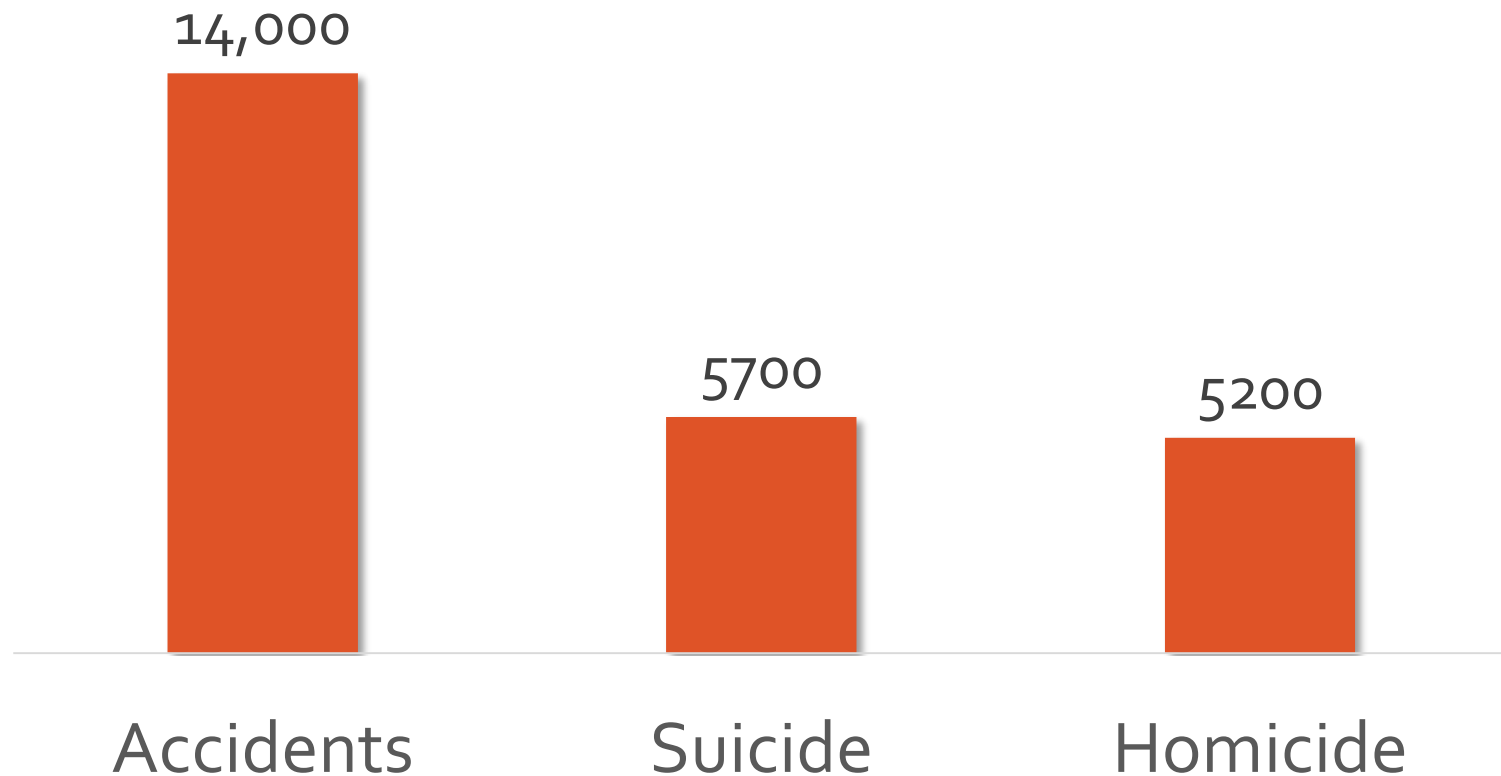
# Leading causes of death, ages 15-24, USA, 2016



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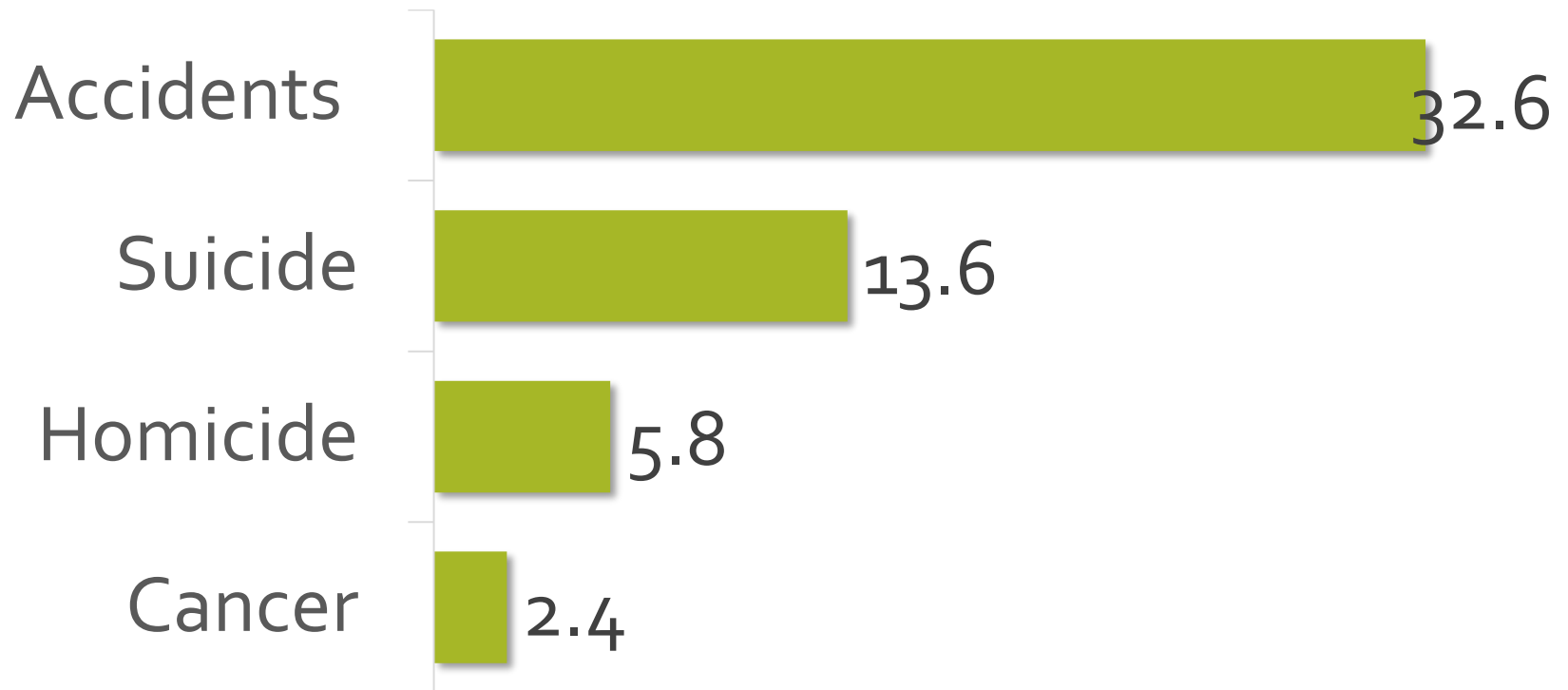


# Role of substance abuse?

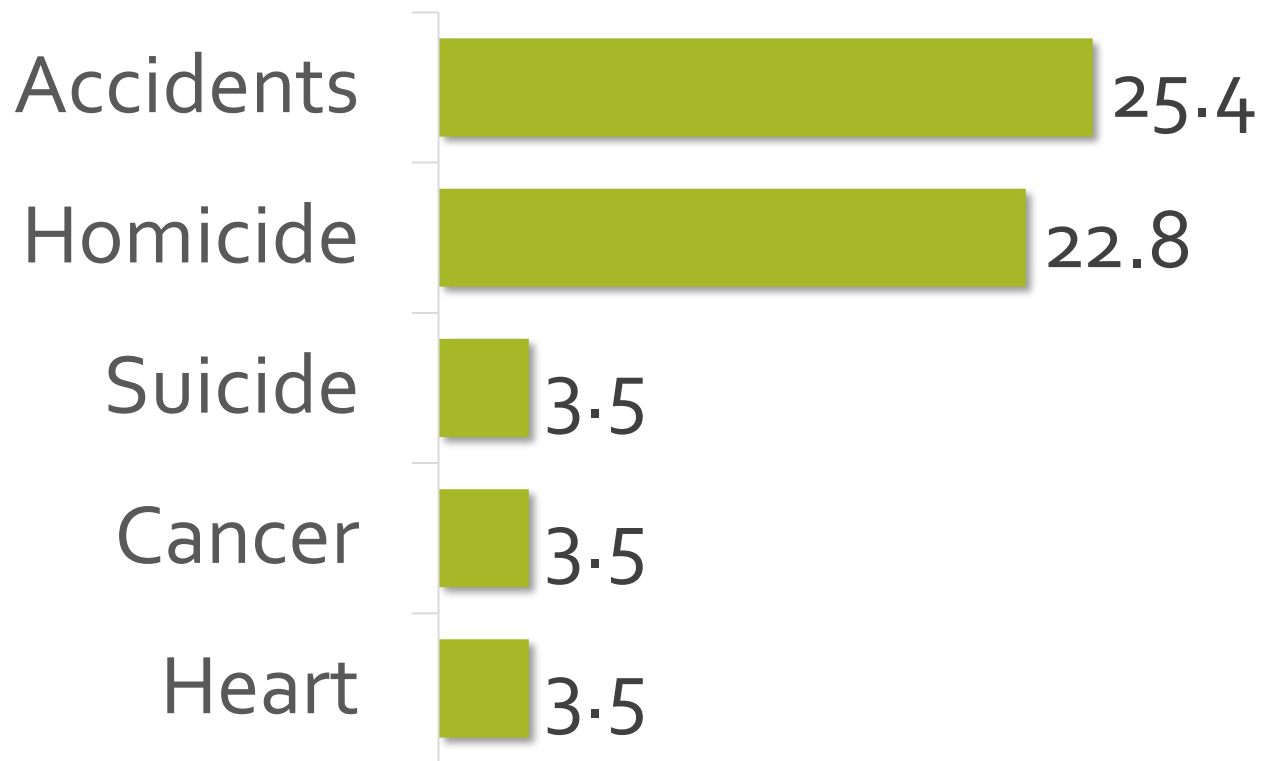


Leading causes of death, ages 15-24, USA, 2016

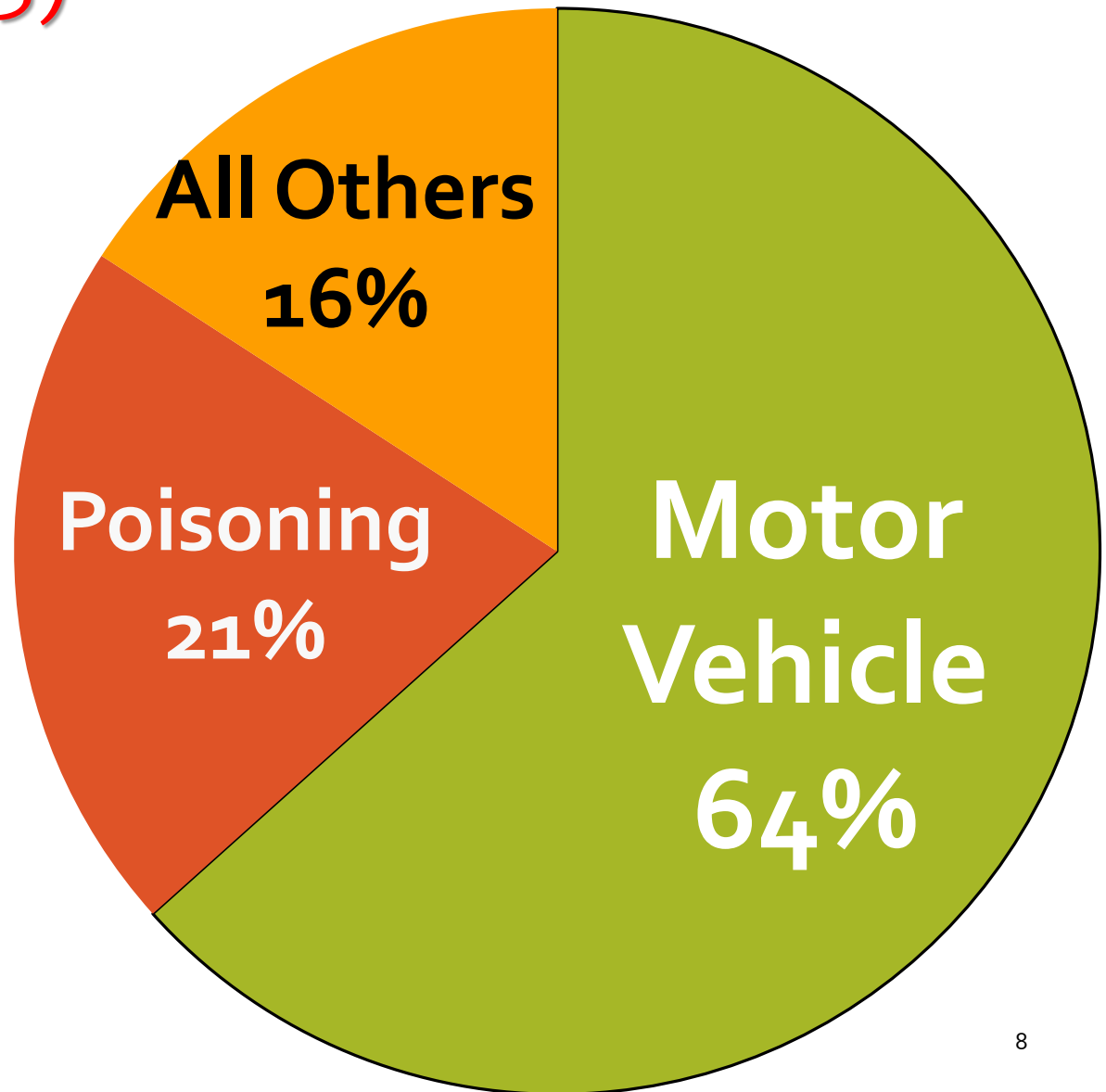
# Alabama Death Rates, Leading Causes, White, age 15-19 (2015)



# Alabama Death Rates, Leading Causes, Black & Other, age 15-19 (2015)



# Alabama: Types of Accidental Deaths, Age 15-24 (2015)





# High risk behavior

Substance Abuse

Driving

Thrill-seeking Physical Behavior

Sexual Assault / Sexual Behavior

Suicidal Behavior/Non-Suicidal Self-Injury

Social Media Errors

# Consequences of High-Risk Behavior

Death

Injury, Including Disabling

Civil & Criminal Penalties

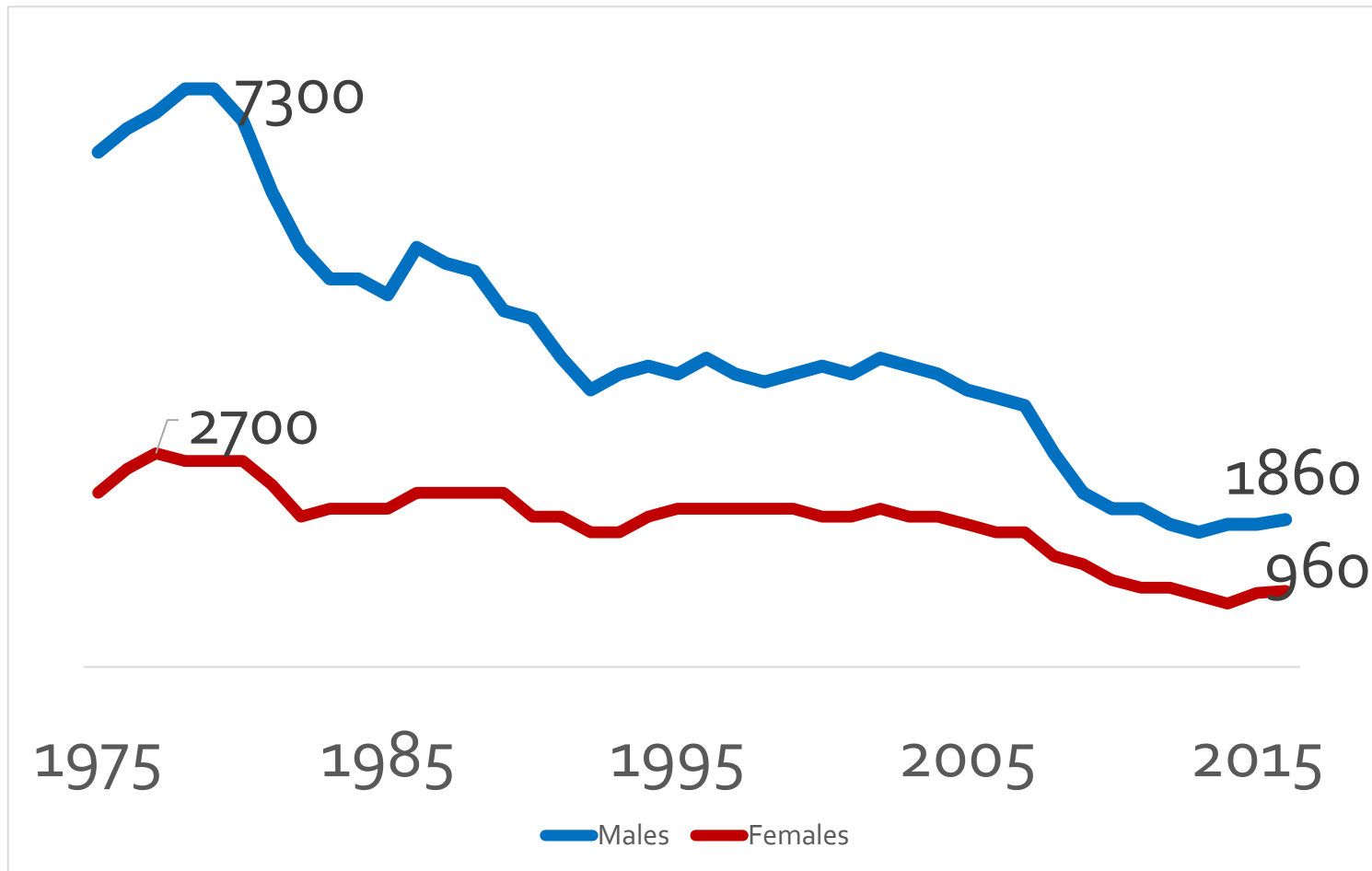
Family Stress / Discord

Financial Strain

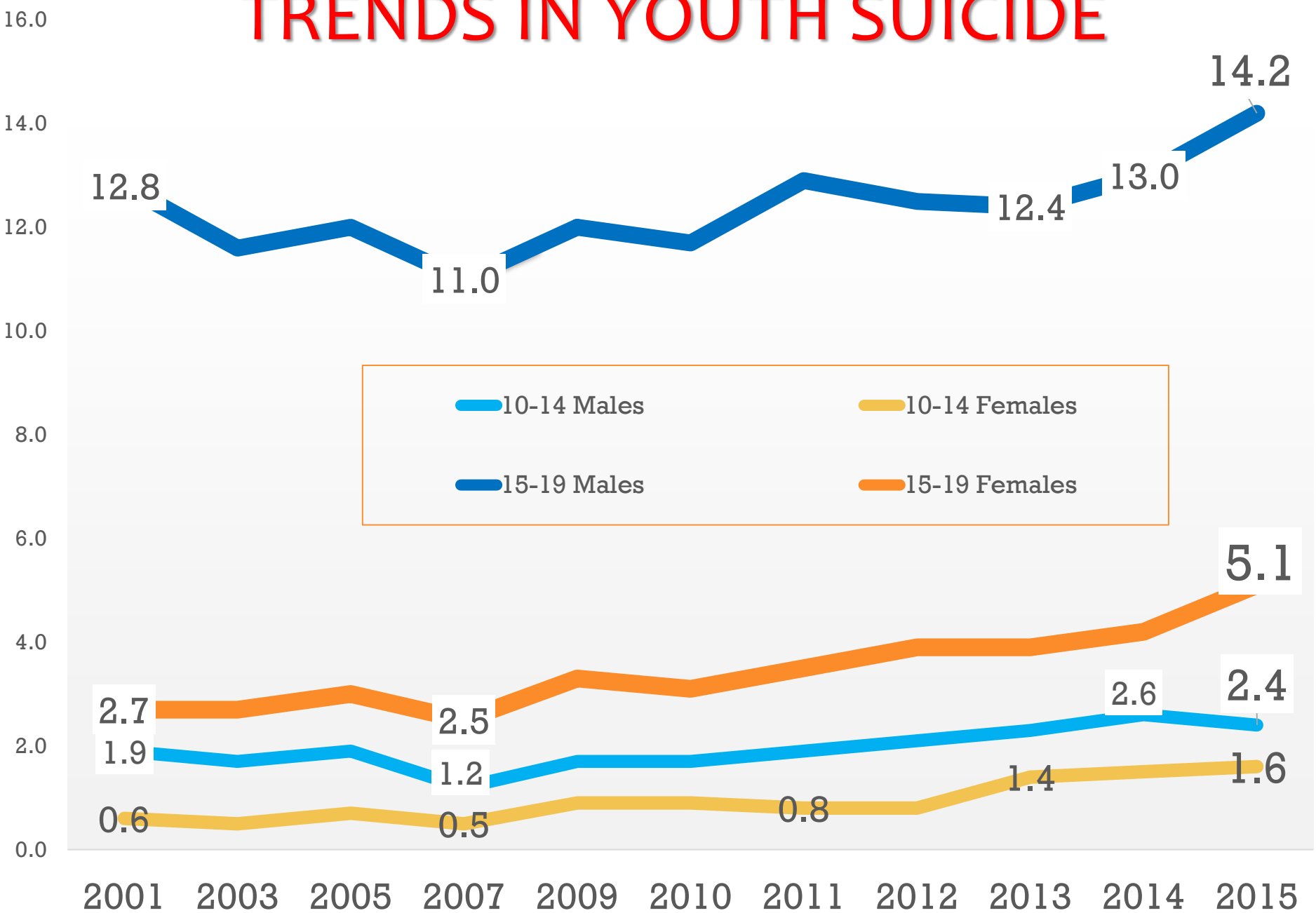
Underachievement

Peer/Relations Problems

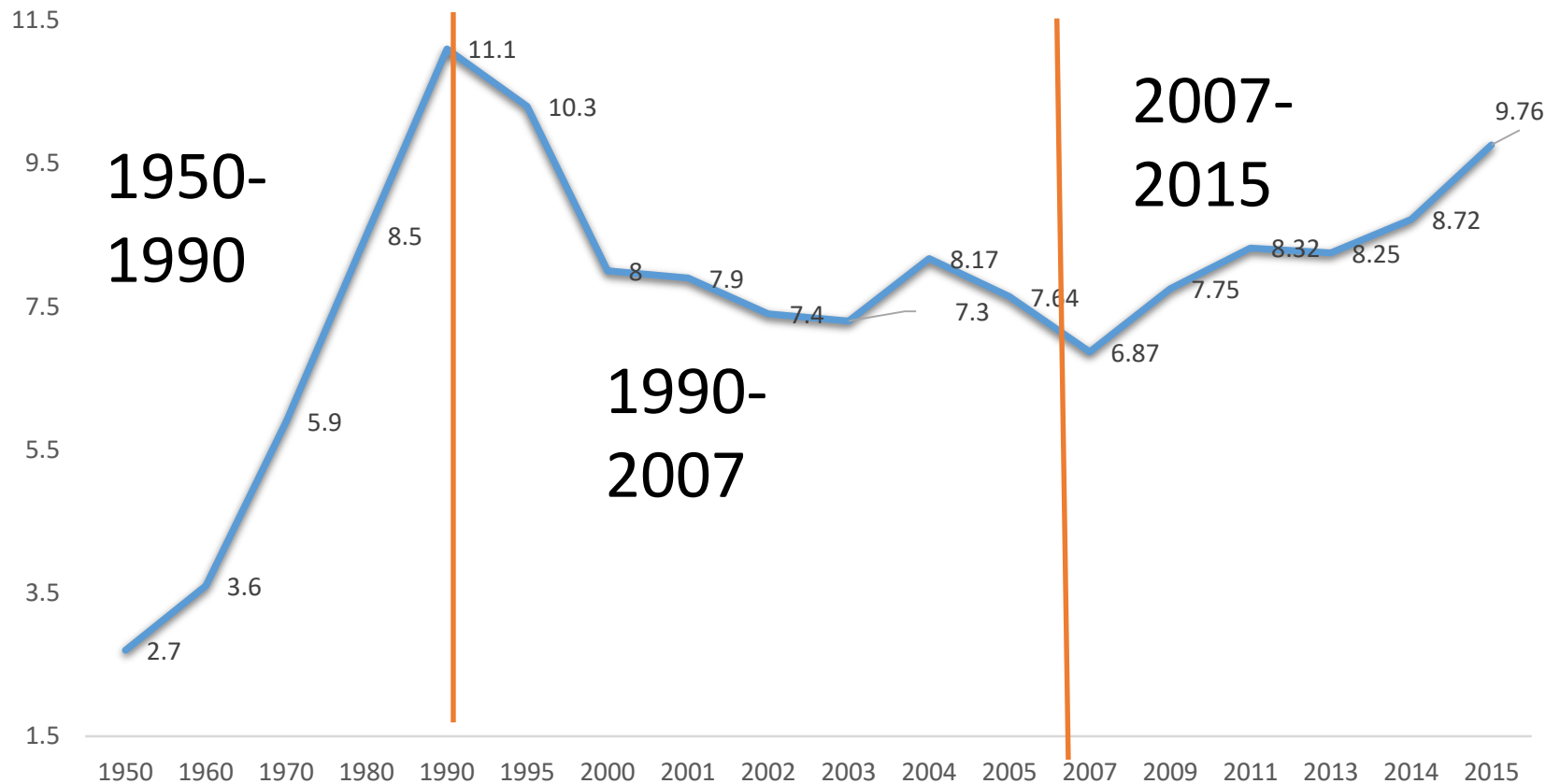
# Teenage Driver Deaths (USA 1975-2016)



# TRENDS IN YOUTH SUICIDE



# Ages 15-19, suicide rates





Suicide rates have  
increased **significantly**  
in all ages in last 15  
years.

Up **25%** in all Americans

Up **22%** in boys and men

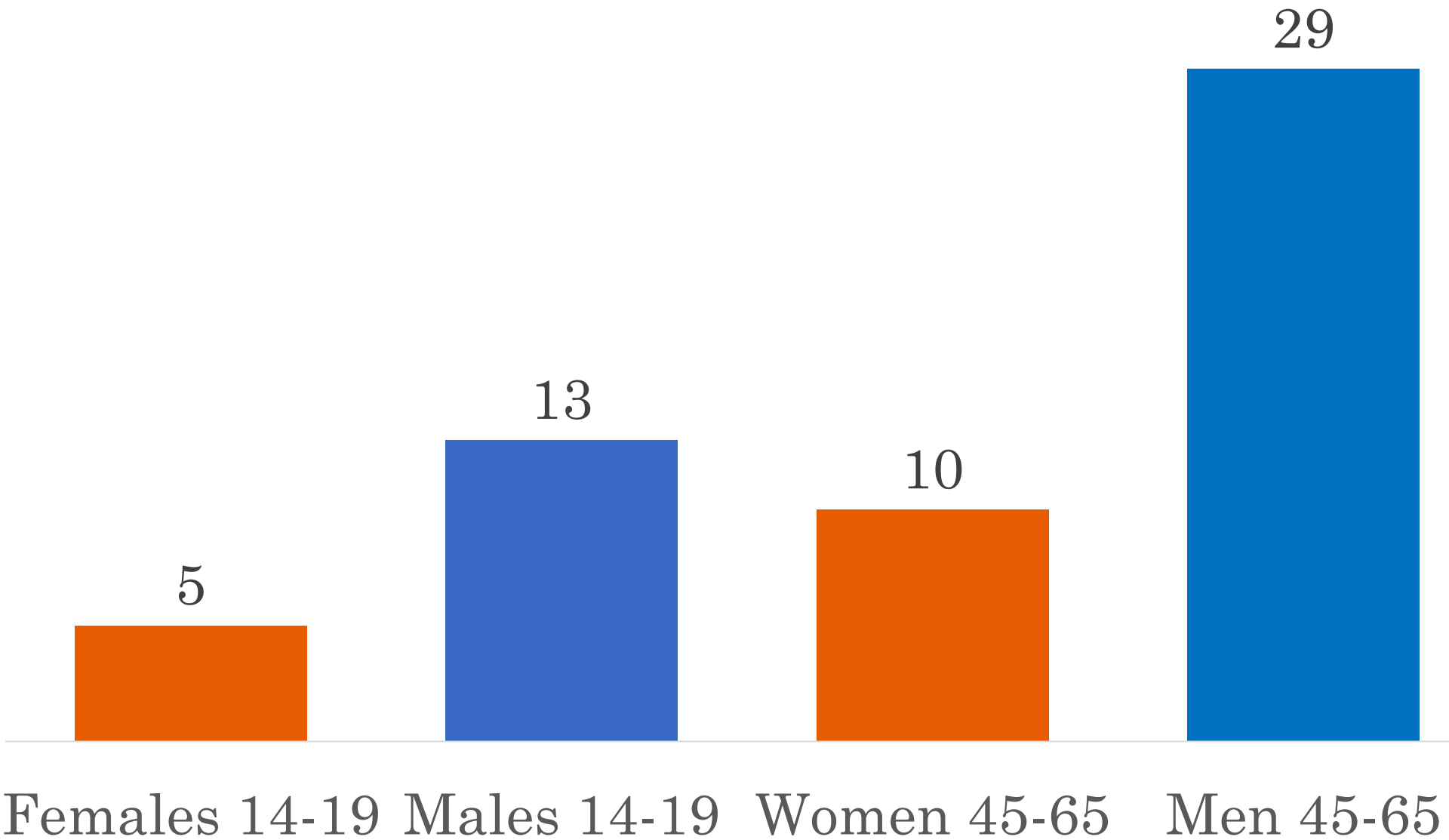
Up **35%** in girls and  
women

Up **82%** young women age  
15-19

Up **150%** in girls age 10-14,  
but still rare.



# 2016 SUICIDE RATES



# NONSUICIDAL SELF-INJURY

**Deliberately  
injuring  
oneself,  
without the  
intent to die**



# NONSUICIDAL SELF-INJURY

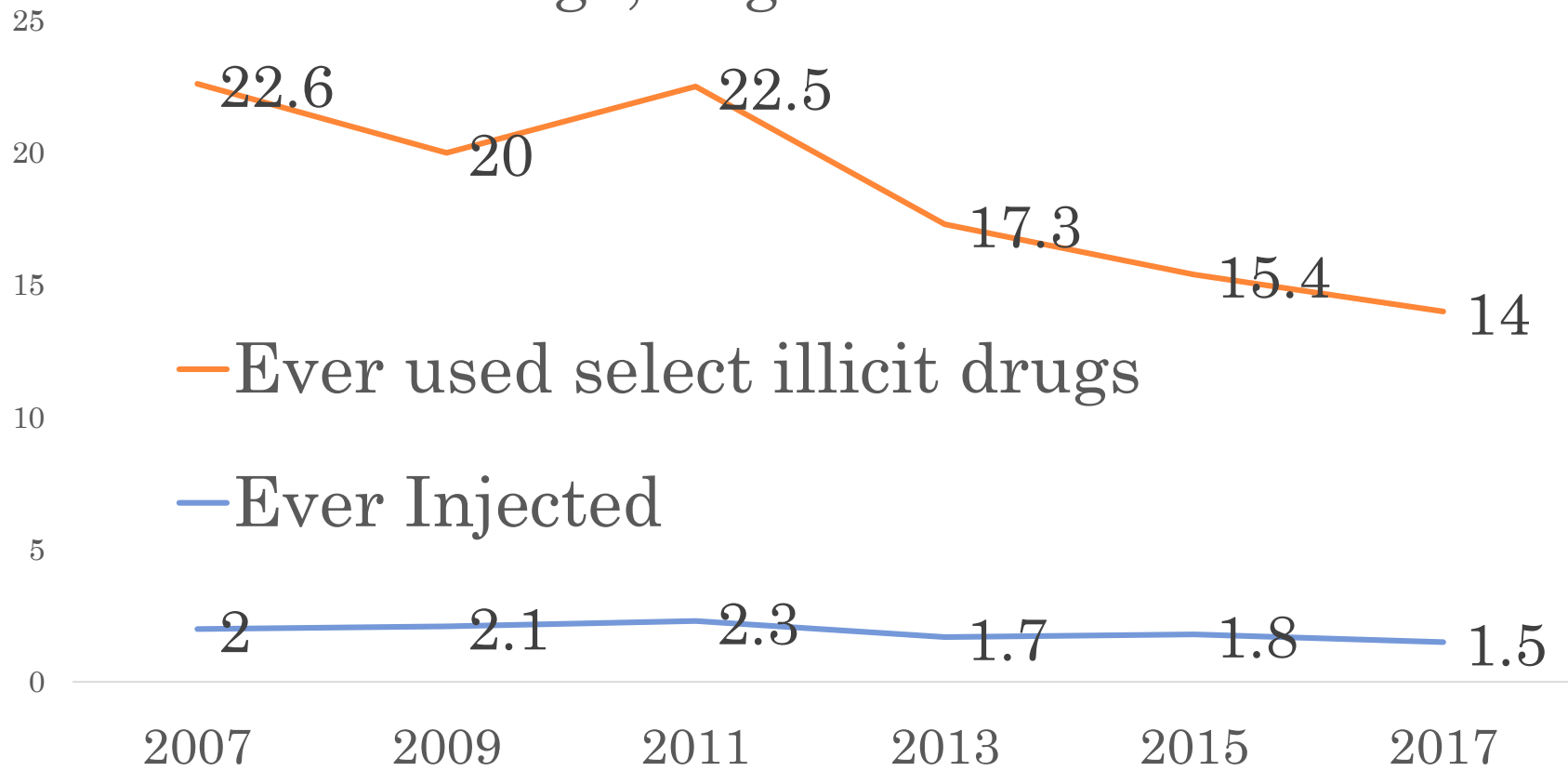
**Also on the rise.**

**Increases risk of  
eventual death  
by suicide.**

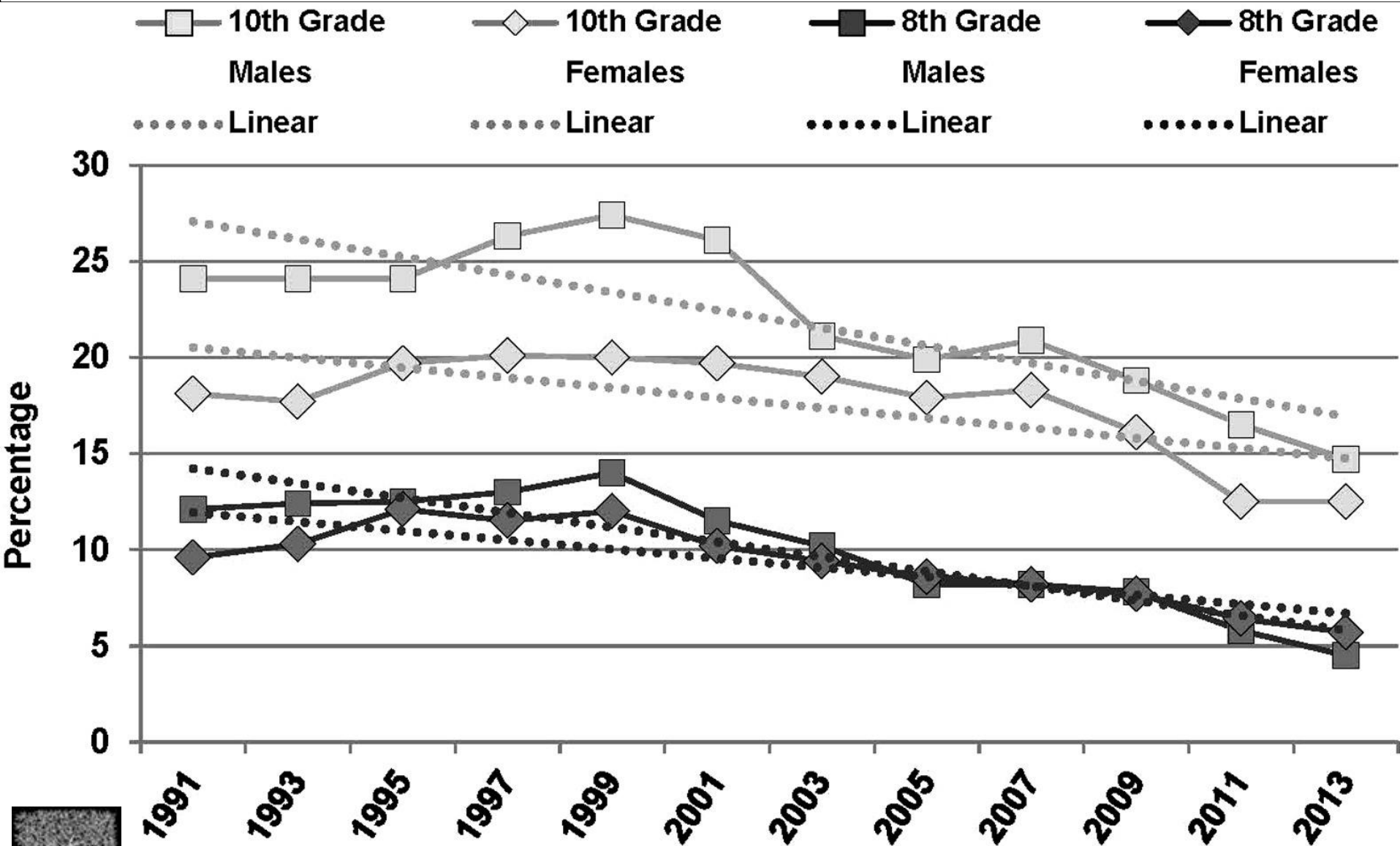


# SUBSTANCE ABUSE (YRB SURVEY)

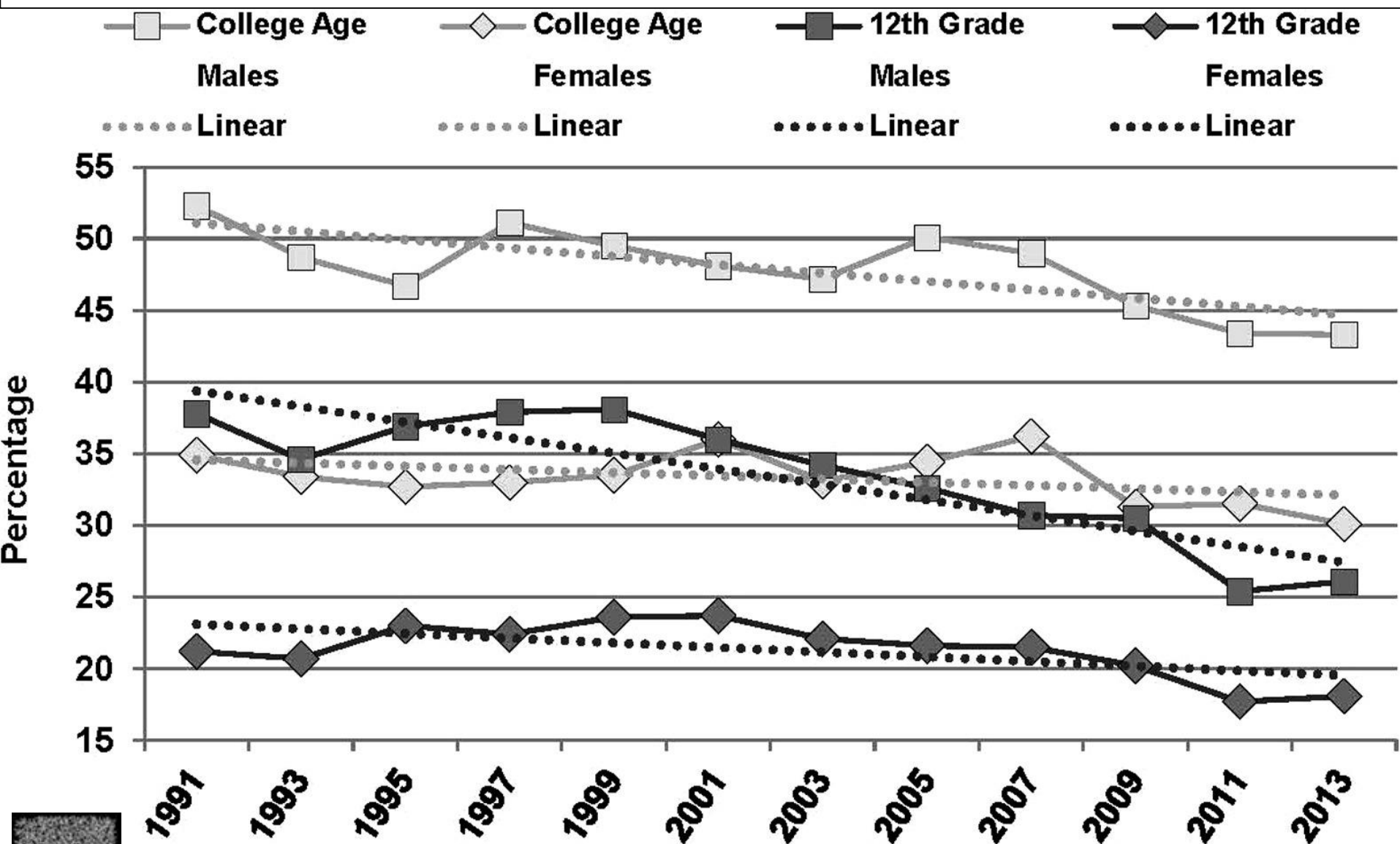
Percentage, High School Students



# BINGE DRINKING, PAST 2 WEEKS, 10TH & 8TH GRADERS

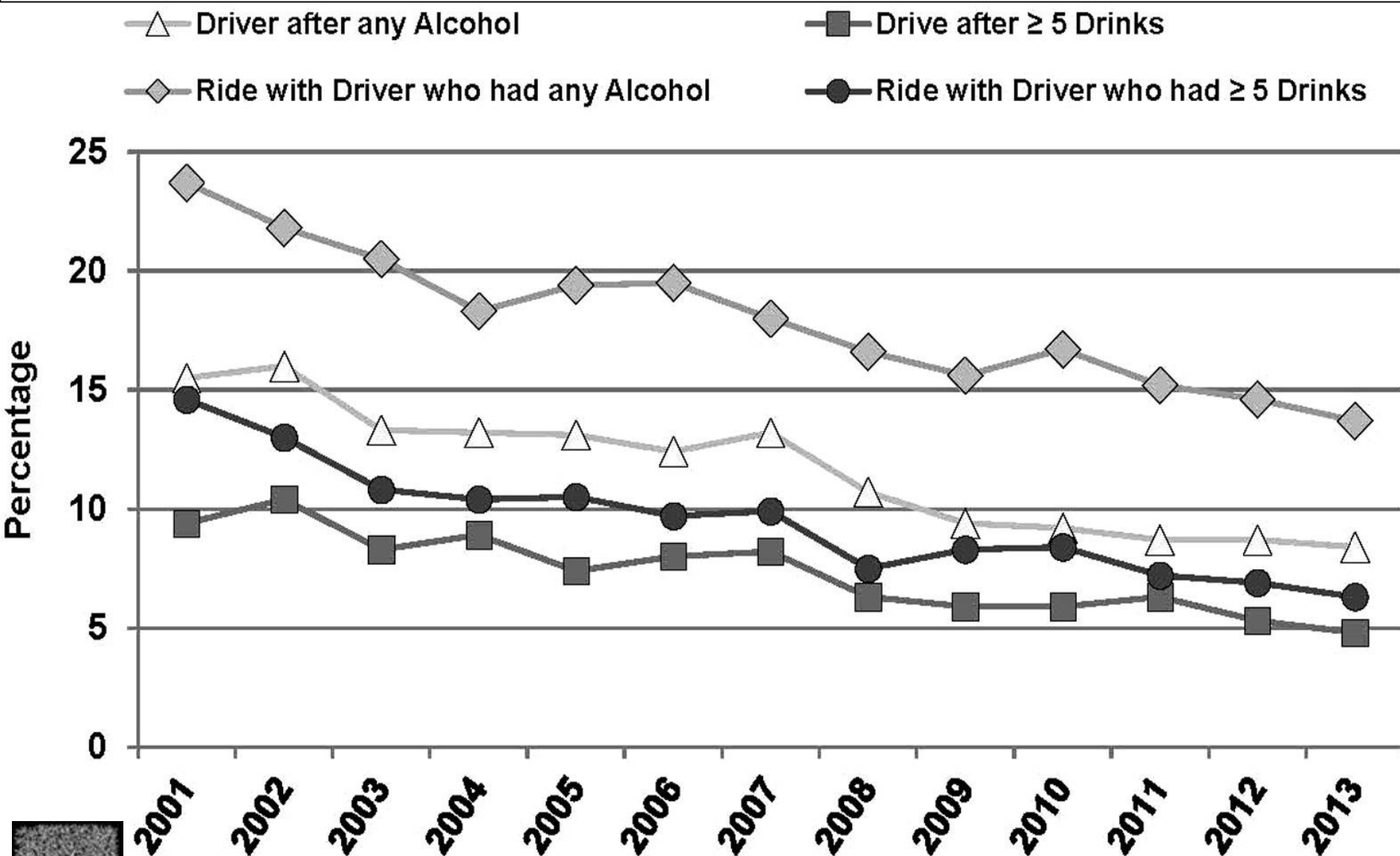


# BINGE DRINKING, PAST 2 WEEKS, 12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE, COLLEGE





# DRIVING/RIDING AFTER DRINKING, 12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE



# MYTH OR TRUTH?

brain is not fully developed until age 25 or so.

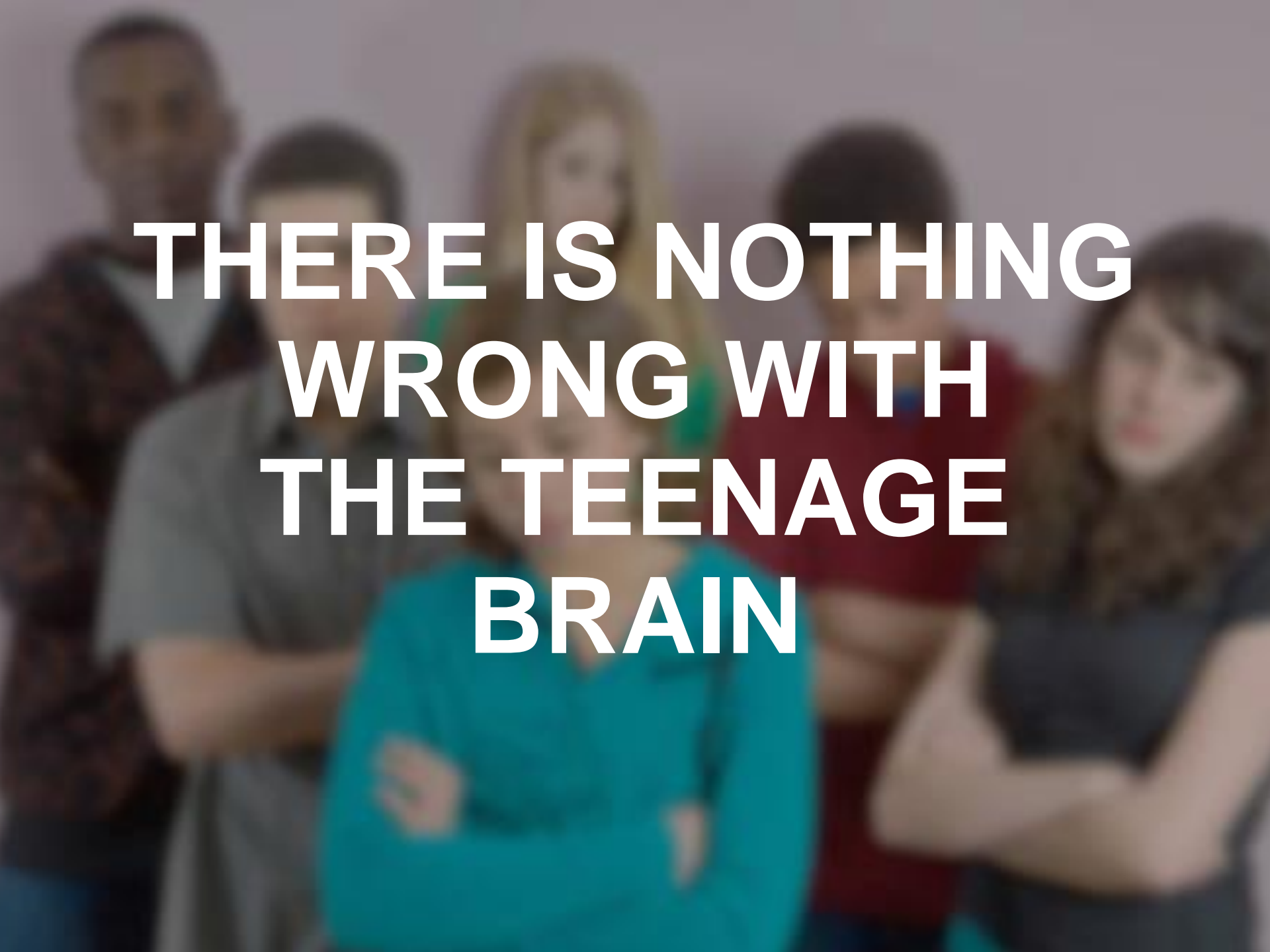
This is why teenagers make bad decisions and engage in dangerous behavior.





**“There is  
something  
wrong with  
the teenage  
brain!”**





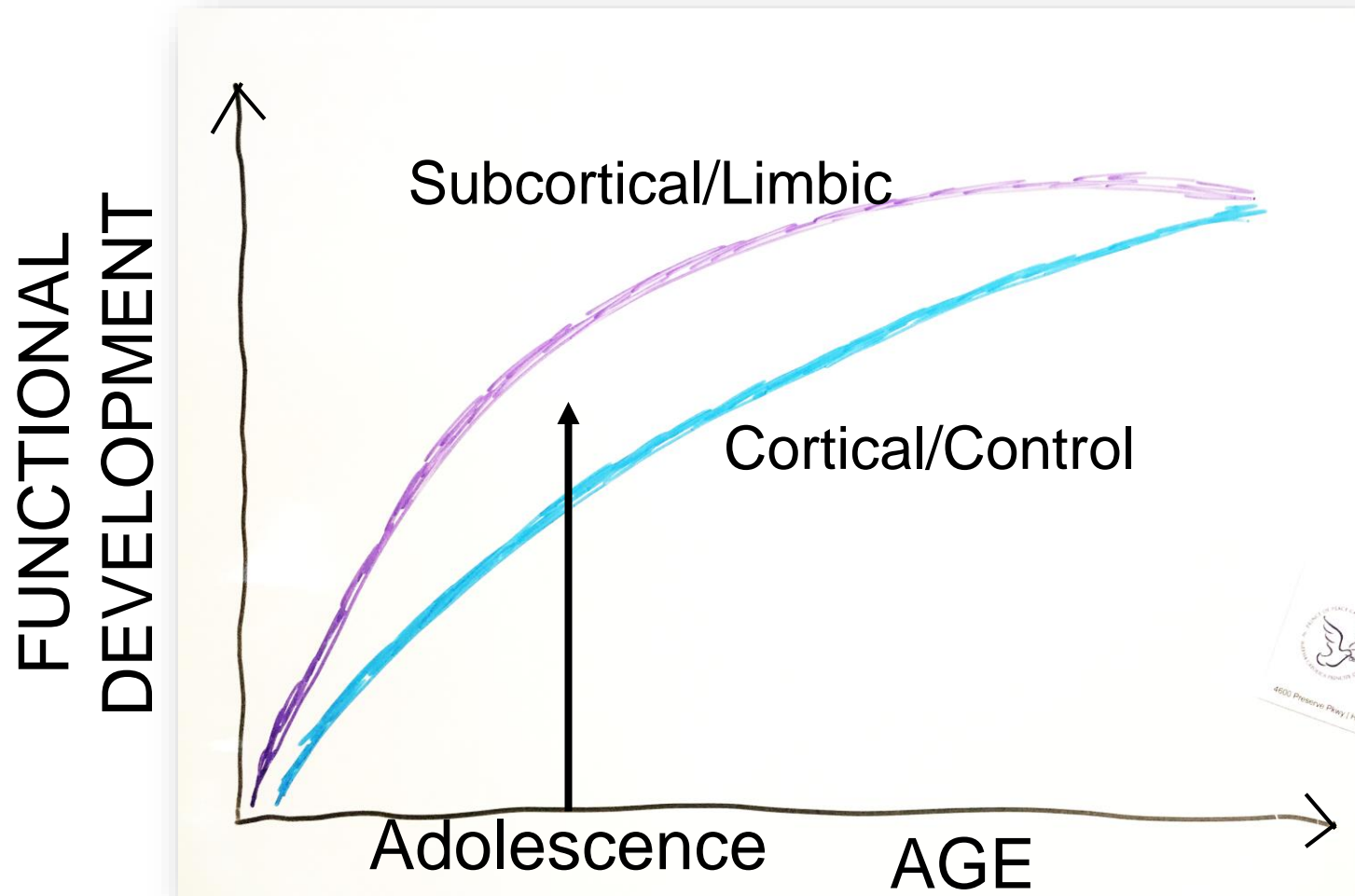
**THERE IS NOTHING  
WRONG WITH  
THE TEENAGE  
BRAIN**



A massive nervous  
system reorganization  
and UPGRADE from  
puberty to mid-20s

# Imbalance model of neuro development in adolescence

(Casey et al., 2008)



*OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW  
BETTER, IN PRINCIPLE,  
BUT TOO YOUNG TO  
EXERCISE JUDGMENT OR  
SELF-CONTROL...*

Chick & Reyna (2012)

# Fuzzy Trace Theory

## Verbatim vs. Gist thinking

*We survey situation and consider acting, based on balance of reward and risk*

Verbatim: Adolescence—analyze value of risk, but often choose poorly, especially if reward magnitude is high. Detailed, but short on *meaning*.

Gist: Big picture, Gestalt, retrieving and applying *values*. “This would rock, but way dangerous.”

“...the more experience one has with a given situation, the simpler the representation...”

“...decision maker must retrieve knowledge, values, or reasoning principles that are relevant to her mental representations of the situation.” (Chick & Reyna, 2012)

# Gist-based decision making:

## *3 steps* (Reyna & Farley, 2012)

1. Must form mental representations of situation. (Verbatim AND Gist aspects)
  - Gist representations shaped by stored knowledge & values, which come from experience, not age.
  - Can form mental reps. of risky situations without ever being in them...thru movies, stories...can create mental reps.



# Gist-based decision making:

*3 steps* (Reyna & Farley, 2012)

2. Must retrieve mental reps. (w/ values, reasoning, knowledge.
3. Must implement in them while IN the situation.
  - May be unable, if reps. *are insufficiently imbedded.*

**So...**

**reward systems at full  
power, judgment & inhibition  
limited**

**powerful peer influences  
stoke reward systems**

**still-developing ability to  
assess danger**

**So...**

**HUMAN problem of  
disconnect between what we  
should and what we do  
emotional arousal, interfering  
with thinking  
no internal repertoire of  
avoidance / exit strategies.**



# EXIT STRATEGIES

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Helping your teenager avoid and get out of dangerous situations



2 aspects of  
development out of  
sync:

Thrill-seeking, especially in social  
context, peaks during teens.

But self-regulation and judgment don't  
reach adult levels until age 23-25.

# What. Were. You. Thinking?





# *background* of high-risk behavior





## **PRESENCE OF PEERS**

What will they think of me?

Monitoring & processing peer reactions



A young man wearing a dark hoodie and a brown jacket is leaning out of the driver's side window of a dark-colored car. He is giving a thumbs-up gesture with his right hand and has a wide, excited smile on his face. In the background, a woman with blonde hair is also smiling and looking towards the camera. The car is parked on a street, and the background is slightly blurred, suggesting motion or a shallow depth of field.

## EMOTIONAL AROUSAL

Excitement  
Thrill / Novelty

Social Influence

+

Emotion

+

Inability to assess danger

=

High Risk Behavior

In high-risk scenarios,  
judgment is  
overwhelmed by

**peers**

- FOMO
- wanting to be united  
with peers

**emotion**

(thrill/excitement)



Teens have  
trouble  
assessing  
danger  
especially while  
in the situation.



What do we need to avoid  
high-risk situations?

Ability to “read” that this  
situation is dangerous

(requires experience & more brain  
development)



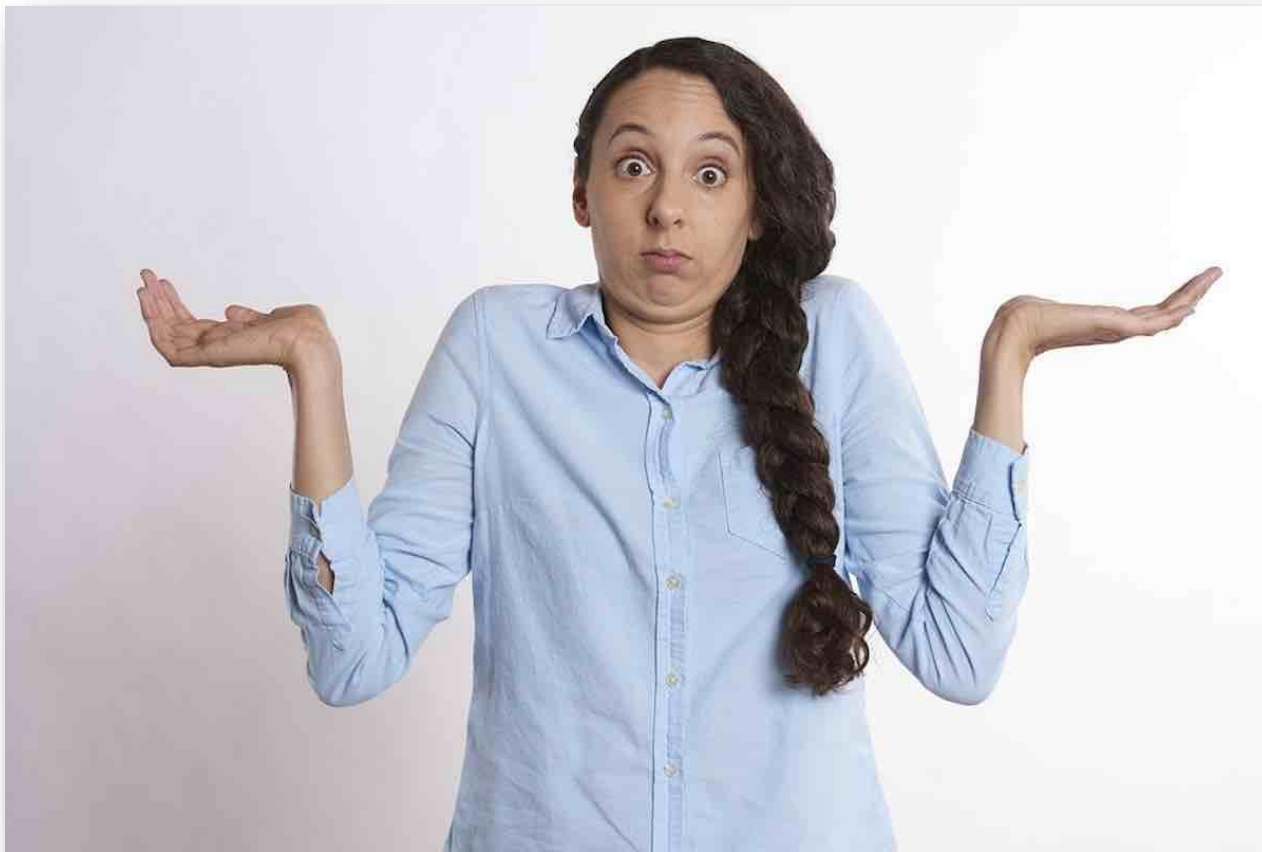
We expect teenagers to *think*, on the fly, in emotionally-charged situations.

What do we need to avoid  
high-risk behavior?

Ability to let perception of risk  
suppress/manage emotional  
arousal

*“this is dumber than it is cool.”*





Even if teenagers DO recognize the danger, if they have no *exit strategy*, this is not the time to think one up.



# Exit strategies

- Avoid (not getting in)
- Exit (getting out)

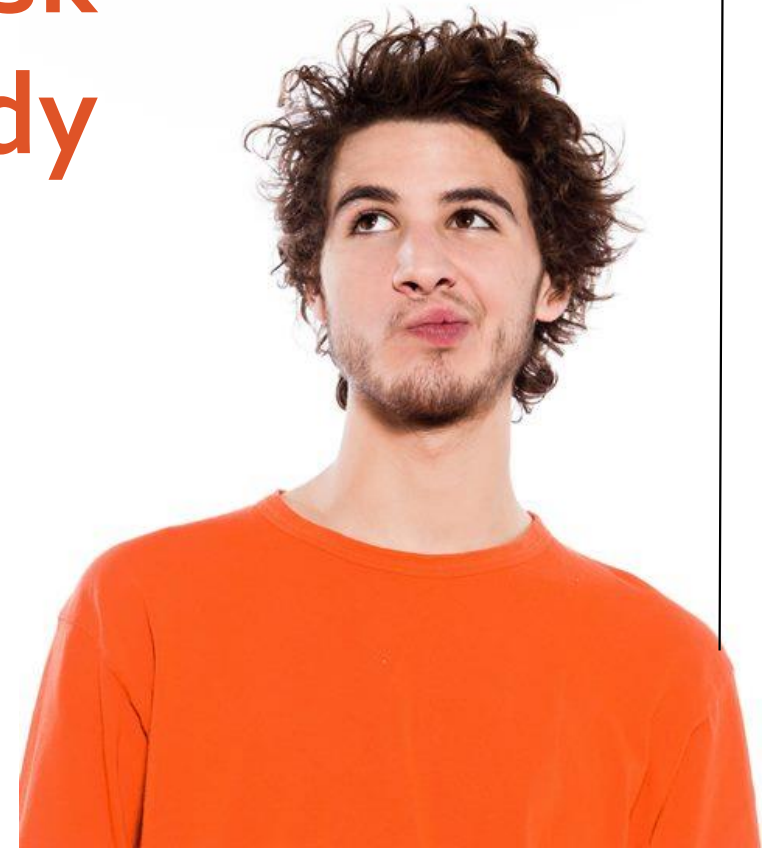
# Goals

- Be better able to **recognize risk** in situation.
- Have **responses** (face-saving strategies) **ready** & “automated.”



# Goals

- recognize risk
- responses ready



**Method:** Discuss scenarios. Teen thinks about danger & exit strategies.



# How?

1. **Set-up**: Parent to teen:  
“Here’s what we are going to be doing & why.”
2. Pose **scenarios** (verbally or by **email**). Look for actual events.

# How?

## 3. **Questions**

- *What are the risks in this scenario?*
- *How can you avoid getting in it?*
- *How can you get out of it?*

## 4. **Repeat** the same or similar scenario.

# High Risk Scenarios

- Alcohol & Drugs
- Driving & Riding
- Sex (Early, risky / sexual assault)
- “Stunts”

*You are staying at a friend's house and a guy who's in college & is a friend of your friend is coming over with his new car. Your friend says the two of you can join him and some of his friends for a ride.*

Q: Risk?

Q: Avoid?

Q: Get out of it?



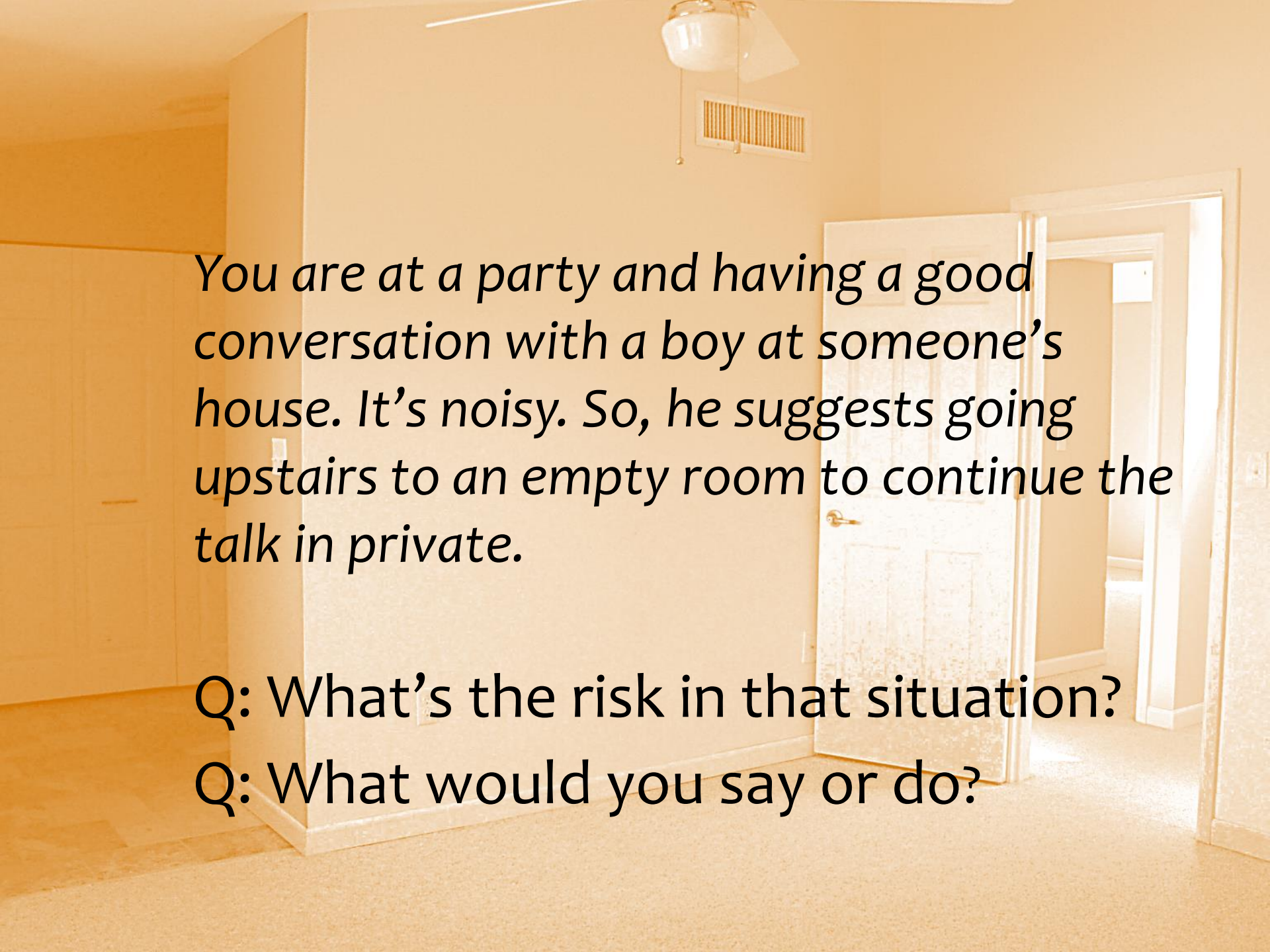


*Your behind on sleep and need to study for a test. Your friend offers to give you one of her Adderalls to help you focus and stay awake.*





*You are at the lake and end up at a  
friend's lake house where  
teenagers are drinking.*

A photograph of a hallway with light-colored walls and carpet. A white door is slightly ajar, revealing a glimpse of another room. A light fixture hangs from the ceiling, and a vent is visible on the wall above the door.

*You are at a party and having a good conversation with a boy at someone's house. It's noisy. So, he suggests going upstairs to an empty room to continue the talk in private.*

**Q: What's the risk in that situation?**

**Q: What would you say or do?**

# Repetition!

- OK, *last time we talked about a boy wanting you to go upstairs at a party... let's go over what you said again.*
- Here's the next one...*

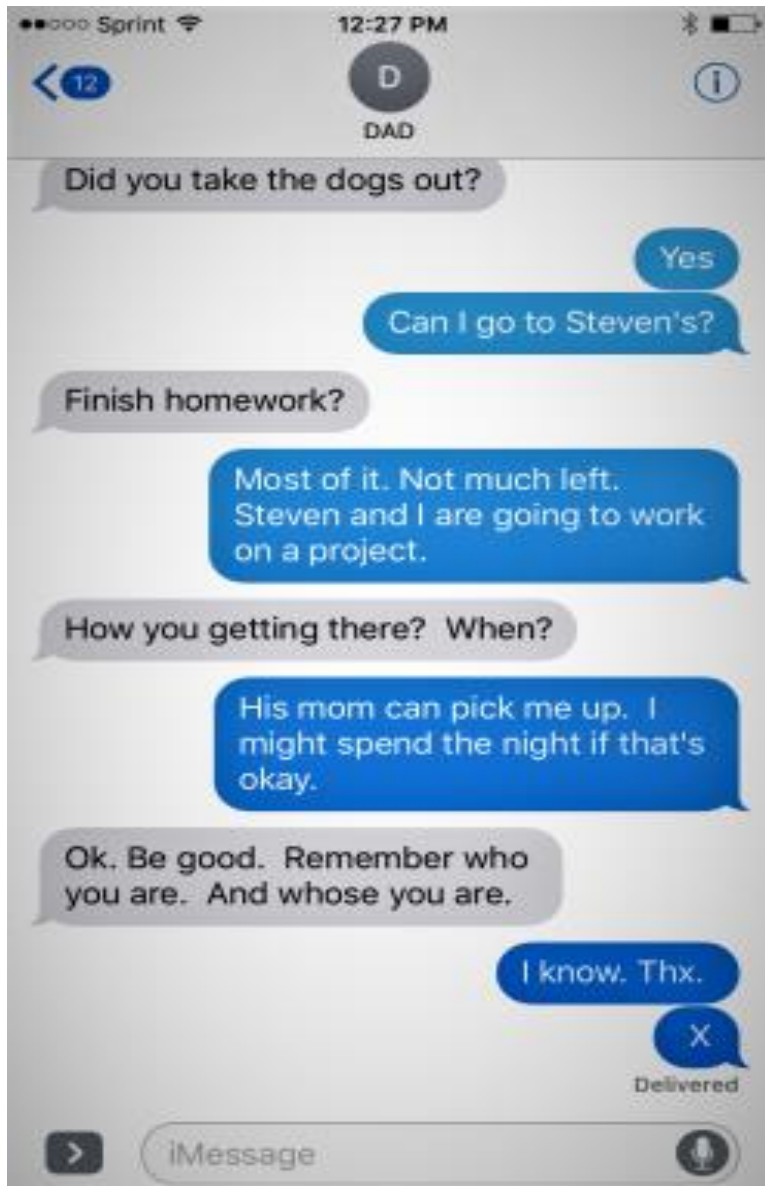
Be transparent about the process.

Ex: “The reason we are going over this more than once is so it will be in your head and ready to go so you won't have to think it up when you're in the situation.”

# Face-saving strategies

- My parents will kill me.
- Don't want to mess up my athletic status.
- I'm not drinking right now.
- Random drug testing.
- Pre-arranged "codes"

# The X Plan. (Bert Fulks)



“Hello?”

“Danny, something’s come up and I have to come get you right now.”

“What happened?”

“I’ll tell you when I get there. Be ready to leave in five minutes. I’m on my way.”



# When to start?



**None of the  
other parents  
are doing this!**





**I know.**



**This is  
embarrassing  
and weird!**



**We can do it  
by email.**





**Do you expect  
me to be honest  
about this stuff?**



**That's not important. It's  
important that you think  
about it.**



**This is stupid.  
I'm not doing it.**





**The more you participate,  
the more I'll say “yes” when  
you ask to go places and do  
things**







**I hate Dr. Wisely.**





# EXIT STRATEGIES

---

Helping your teenager avoid and get out of dangerous situations

Will hypothetical  
scenarios & responses  
generalize to real life?

Will parents start  
doing this & sustain it?

