

## On Your Side: Grad season deadly for young drinkers

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MONTREAL -

Last year 33 young Quebecers aged between 16-24 died in car accidents in June and July alone, a rise from the year prior.

The common culprit in these senseless deaths is alcohol.

### PHOTOS



Angeliki Souranis of the Montreal Children's Hospital counsels mourners, but that didn't prepare her the loss of her 20-year-old son.

The grad season sees many young people experimenting with alcohol and some parents even permit or encourage drinking as a part of the rite of passage.

However, one major study demonstrated that kids who drink with parental supervision actually end up prone to more problems, including binge drinking.

At the Montreal Children's Hospital Angeliki Souranis counsels families through painful times.

But over 20 years in social work never prepared her for the death of her own son.

"I thought I understood what parents go through when they go through a crisis like that and I'm here to tell you that I didn't know," said Souranis.

Souranis' 20-year-old son, Craig was killed four summers ago.

He'd been out drinking with friends at a lake.

Souranis thought she'd had all the conversations she needed with her son about drinking and driving. But on that fatal day Craig wasn't wearing a seat belt. And there was no designated driver.

"He was taught about seat belts. He was taught about getting into a car with a drunk driver and it still happened," said Souranis.

Drivers aged between 16-24 years-olds account for one tenth of Quebec drivers but they are involved in one quarter of all accidents involving injury. And almost half of those that are fatal involve alcohol.

And while video games aimed at young people glamourize risk, new research suggests young people are less worried about being killed or maimed than they are about being ostracized. In other words, risk-taking is less scary than being left out.

The director of the Children's Trauma Centre says even when limousines are hired for grads alcohol and teens don't mix.

"Some end the grad night sick, or worse, in the intensive care unit for acute alcohol intoxication," said Debbie Friedman of the Montreal Children's Hospital.

And she says sometimes parents are part of the problem.

"I've witnessed it myself where parents are handing the kids 40 ounce bottles of vodka as if it's a rite of passage," said Friedman. "It's an important milestone but let it be the beginning of many more important milestones to follow."

And Angeliki Souranis wants every parent to know what she now really knows.

"These accidents don't just happen to somebody else. My son should have known not to get into a car with someone who had been drinking. It was a very, very steep price to pay for an error in judgment."

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