

DRAFT

Two weeks ago, the Cunningham Park Foundation Board wrote a letter to the Milton Times imploring parents to keep their teens from gathering at night in Cunningham Park to socialize, drink, and use drugs. The Milton Coalition (formerly the Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition) wholeheartedly agrees that it is time for community-wide engagement to address “the woods.”

Partying in the woods has been a part of Milton culture for generations, but it is high time we change. Underage alcohol use is a complex problem and there are no simple solutions. This problem will only be solved with a range of responses from multiple perspectives. Your help is needed.

Based on the work the Milton Coalition has already done, we are confident our community can reduce partying in the woods. When the Milton Coalition, in partnership with Milton Public Schools analyzed data in 2016 from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), our youth alcohol use was 50% for high schoolers. Data from the 2022 YRBS found alcohol use at 31%. A vast improvement over six years. We have done this by making sure that youth and families have the right information and skills for making positive decisions about alcohol use, as well as environmental and policy changes. However, work remains to be done. To get to the next level of change, to address our culture, we need greater parental buy-in and expanded town-wide involvement. As individuals and a community, we must ask:

Do we provide enough substance free places for our youth to socialize? Plenty of youth say that they are not interested in drinking, but the woods are where their friends are. Where can high schoolers go where there is no pressure to use alcohol?

Are we clear about expectations and consequences when it comes to underage drinking? Youth deserve clear messages about values, expectations, and consequences from adults in their lives, as well as community institutions. What messages are we sending our youth now, not only about alcohol, but about how we value them?

Do families get enough support to deal with past trauma and resources to prevent it? Childhood trauma that is not dealt with, along with a genetic disposition to addiction, can increase the chances of early alcohol and drug use and later substance use disorder.

The Cunningham Park Foundation Board is no longer going to turn away from trespassing on park property. We should not turn away from the needs of our youth. Please join us in this important work.

Learn more about the Milton Coalition and how to get involved here: www.milton-coalition.org. On the website you can sign up for the newsletter, find out about upcoming events, find links to conversation starters and guides for talking to youth about alcohol. There is also information about treatment and support services. We can also be reached by emailing: info@milton-coalition.org

The Milton Coalition