Experts: Parents are often too tolerant of alcohol

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Staff Writer

LAFAYETTE — David Rees doesn’t need scientific research to tell him teen drinking is on the rise in Acadiana.
“IT’s the norm for most ninth- and 10th-graders. My proof is the number of kids I’ve seen come through that door for treatment,” said Rees, a general psychiatrist and former Alcohol and Drug Abuse Clinic director.

Research indicates that some teens are genetically predisposed to alcoholism, Rees said. But the Acadiana culture and parents also must accept

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Expert

responsibility for the trend, he said.

“There’s a blind admiration of alcohol here, an acceptance of it as a necessary part of a good time,” he said. “For proof, walk around at one of the many festivals throughout the area. Nine times out of 10, revelers are holding a drink in their hand.”

About 98.6 percent of teens experiment with alcohol before graduating from high school, said Mike Crane, a board-certified substance abuse counselor. That’s because alcohol is cheap and culturally accepted, he said.

Adults try to rationalize their willingness to accept underage drinking as the norm, Crane said. Some parents let their teens have parties at home, he said.

“Then, the parents go out and buy the alcohol for the party,” Crane said. “They rationalize it by saying, ‘They’re going to do it anyway. At least I know they’ll be safe at home.’

It sends the wrong message to teens, he said.

“What the parents are saying is it’s OK for their kids to drink.” Crane said. “It’s not OK. We’re sacrificing our kids on the altar of alcohol.”

Excess that has become today’s norm, said Jeff Sandoz, family counselor and UL Lafayette professor. That excess contributed to the deterioration of the community spirit of nearly 40 years ago, when adults would help raise each others’ children, he said.

Today, adults avoid correcting someone else’s children for fear of being chastised, Sandoz said.

“It’s part of the cultural denial associated with alcoholism,” he said. “The chastisers say things like, ‘Leave him alone. He’s just having a good time.’ Actually, no. He’s not. He’s endangering his life. Alcoholism is a progressive, fatal disease that’s incurable.”

Parents who suspect their teens of drinking should make their children understand the consequences involved, Crane said.

“It makes you stupid - prone to cry, fight, laugh uncontrollably or be sexually promiscuous,” he said.