



Talking to your teenager about alcohol

Australian children live in a world where alcohol is regularly promoted and consumed, so it's useful for them to discuss alcohol with their parents from an early age and understand what their parents expect of them.

Talking to your teen

The best time to start talking about risky alcohol use is before it happens. Parents can use media portrayal of alcohol use and related problems to start discussions that are general, rather than subjective and sensitive.

As children get older, parents have a critical role: know where your children are and who they are with, and be clear about your expectations (keeping in touch, time to come home, what will happen if they break the rules) and what to do if they get into difficulty.

Discussing teenage alcohol-related harm

Talk about how alcohol might affect them even if they don't drink themselves. Rather than just telling them what concerns you, try to find out what they might be concerned about, such as how drinking may lead to behaviour they'll later regret. You could ask if they know of examples of this happening to others – either on television or in movies, or in their day-to-day lives. This can help you reach an agreement on your rules about drinking and explain the rationale for those rules.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines state that for those under the age of 15, it is important not to drink. And for those aged 15 to 17, the safest option is to not drink and to delay starting drinking.

Explaining the effects of alcohol with teenagers can help when discussing why alcohol use should be delayed until 18 years of age. This summary of alcohol-related harms for young people may help:

- Alcohol use contributes to the three leading causes of death among adolescents including unintentional injuries, homicide and suicide.

- Other harms include risk-taking behaviour, unsafe sex choices, sexual coercion, academic achievement, adverse behavioural patterns and alcohol overdose.
- Research indicates that alcohol may affect brain development and be linked to alcohol-related problems later in life.
- The safest option for teenagers is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible.

Information and support

If you're having difficulties dealing with any of the topics outlined in this flyer you don't have to go it alone. There are alcohol and other drug services in your community that can provide professional assistance and information. The listings below provide current information, support and referrals to services available in your area.

Alcohol and Drug Support Line

(08) 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country callers).

A free 24-hour, state-wide, confidential telephone information and support service for parents and families concerned about alcohol and other drug use. Callers can speak with a professional counsellor or be put in touch with local Community Drug Service Teams in your area who can provide counselling, education and support.

Parent and Family Drug Support Line

(08) 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country callers).

A free 24-hour, state-wide, confidential telephone information and support service for parents and families concerned about alcohol and other drug use. Callers can speak to either a professional counsellor or to a trained parent volunteer who has experience with a child using alcohol and other drugs.

No one should give alcohol to under 18s.

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