



Alcohol, your kids, and you

:: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS ::

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Is your teenager drinking?

The answer is “most likely”. Often parents can’t believe their child is experimenting with alcohol, but ALAC’s Youth Drinking Monitor (2002–2003) shows:

- :: The average age of starting to drink is now just over 13 1/2.
- :: Almost all (88 percent) of 14 to 17-year-olds claimed they had tried alcohol.

Learning to handle alcohol is a challenge your teenager – and you – will have to face.

IS YOUR TEENAGER DRINKING RESPONSIBLY?

Here’s more news that may come as a surprise.

- :: 23 percent of all 14 to 17-year-olds claim to have drunk five or more glasses of alcohol on their last drinking occasion.
- :: 44 percent of teenage drinkers vomited after drinking. 27 percent have got into an argument or fight.
- :: One in eight have got into sexual situations they were unhappy with.
- :: One in 11 have been in trouble with the law because of drinking.

Problem drinking by teenagers is causing serious health and social issues. Research shows it’s also likely to bring these kids, and the community, more problems later on.

FOR YOUR KID’S SAKE

Teenagers drink for the same reasons adults do – to relax and wind down, for confidence when socialising, or for the buzz. However, adolescence is also a time of risk-taking and experimentation.

Whatever the reason, chances are high that your teenager will be involved with alcohol. Helping them deal with it is your job – part of being a parent. Your advice and support is critical even though it may not always be welcomed.

THE LATER, THE BETTER

Disregard stories about people in Europe introducing children to alcohol at an early age. Research shows that the younger drinking starts, the more likely it is that there will be problems in the future.

A TEENAGER'S TIPS:

"Respect my privacy. I'll take stuff from you a lot better if you give me my space and treat me more like an adult."

"Don't criticise me or blame me. When you attack me I just stop listening."

"Talk to me. I don't read minds."

"Pick your moments. There are times I'm relaxed and in the mood for talking, like when we're in the car. Stay tuned for them."

"Don't tell me what to think. I need to make up my own mind. Though, I need to get the facts about things I don't know about."

"Don't nag. I just protect myself by switching off – or I find I have to lie to get you off my back."

"Don't say one thing about alcohol and act a totally different way yourself. I can tell when you're being hypocritical."

"Be straight with me. If something's bugging you, come out and tell me. I hate it when you don't say what's worrying you. Just maybe, you've got it totally wrong..."

"Don't try and protect me from every consequence. I'm not thick. I can learn from my mistakes. And anyway, you won't stop me. I have to find out for myself."



Even if you don't stay in the same room all the time, young people will be safer if adults are moving through the party regularly. Serving food achieves this effortlessly.

FOOD AND OTHER DRINKS

If there's going to be drinking, always make sure there's food to go with it.

Eating slows down the absorption of alcohol. Have plenty of 'real' food (pizzas, sausage rolls, hot chips) available – not just chips and nuts.

Give guests alternatives by making non-alcoholic drinks just as easy to get as alcoholic ones – juice, soft drinks, iced water.

“A good feed really takes the edge off a thirst.”

HANDLING GATECRASHERS

Ask a friend or relative to help you deal with uninvited guests. Hiring security staff is also an option. Experience suggests it needs more than two adults to supervise a party of twenty people.

CALLING 'TIME'

Fix a finish time and stick to it. Get the adults to work together to wind things up – perhaps have them come at a set time to pick their kids up.

Clearing away bottles and cans, empty or full, usually works. If there's no more booze, there's no more drinking.

HOSTS AND THE LAW

Under 18-year-olds can drink alcohol in a private home or at a private function. It is legal for an adult host to provide liquor free of charge for this purpose.

Under 18-year-olds can bring liquor to your party so long as it was given to them by their parent or guardian. It is illegal for them to buy booze or get another adult to buy it for them in return for payment.

Note – a parent or legal guardian does not include anyone else acting temporarily in the place of a parent. Nor does it include other family members such as aunts, uncles, older brothers and sisters, older boyfriends or girlfriends, older husbands or wives, teachers or sports coaches.



DRINKING AND/OR DRUGS AFFECTS SCHOOL

Problem drinking doesn't mean your teenager is an alcoholic. They may drink as a way of coping with their troubles. Talk with them. Listen carefully and respectfully. If necessary, talk with somebody else. Check the help and information section for ideas.

DRINKING THAT SEEMS OUT OF CONTROL

If a discussion with your teenager doesn't improve the situation, discuss your concerns with a professional. Services are available in most centres – the Alcohol Helpline has the contact details. You can call them free on 0800 787 797.

“Sometimes it's best to just breathe through your nose.”

You never get anywhere when you're angry. Talk things over when you've cooled down.



