

USEFUL

WEB LINKS

These websites contain valuable resources that will provide you and your teenager with more information on alcohol and drugs.

If you think your teenager has a problem

Contact the Alcohol and Drug Information Service on:

(02) 9361 8000
or 1800 422 599

Toll free, 24 hours. Your call will be completely private. If you need an interpreter call 13 14 50.

www.det.nsw.edu.au (search word 'alcohol')

Information for parents, with practical suggestions for hosting parties and guidelines for young people to celebrate safely.

www.drinkwise.com.au

A good visual interpretation of what is a 'standard drink'.

www.druginfo.adf.org.au

Information on alcohol and the role of parents, families, and the broader community in reducing drug abuse.

www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au

Up to date information on alcohol and drugs.

www.fds.org.au

Information and support for families of drug users, covering all aspects of illicit drug and alcohol use.

www.healthinsite.gov.au

Links to information about the health effects of alcohol use on young people.

www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/mhcs/

Information resources on alcohol in languages other than English.

www.lawstuff.org.au

Follow links to 'When can I drink alcohol?' for information on legal age drinking and supplying alcohol to minors.

www.mynite.com.au

Information to help you minimise the risks so that you and your guests can have a fun and hassle free party.

www.rta.nsw.gov.au/roadsafety/

RTA Drinking and Driving brochure (link under 'Useful downloads').

www.whatRUdoing2URself.com

What are you doing to yourself when you binge drink?

YOUR

GUIDE

to dealing with teenagers & alcohol

NSW HEALTH

ISBN 978-1-74187-221-7, SHPN (MHDAD) 080054. © NSW Health 2008.

"I give my daughter a four-pack of alcoholic cola when she goes to a party. Then I know what she's drinking."

"I get fed up with my daughter trying to push the limits. She isn't allowed to drink alcohol until she's 18 and I'm not discussing it any further."

"I had my first beer when I was 14 and it never did me any harm."

"My daughter has a glass or two of wine with dinner – she's very responsible."

"My son likes to drink but he knows his limits."

"Watching the footy on TV and having a beer with my son is like a family tradition."

"My 15 year old has been hassling me to go to a party. She said there'll be alcohol there but swears she won't be drinking."

IT IS NO SECRET
THAT TEENAGERS
LIKE TO EXPERIMENT
AND TRY NEW
THINGS.

Alcohol is one of them.

As a parent, it's easy to feel responsible if your underage son or daughter arrives home drunk or gets into trouble at a pub somewhere.

Whilst it is understandable to be worried about the effects alcohol will have on your teenager, it is likely they will try it.

In fact, 90 percent of Australians say they have had alcohol at some stage in their life – many trying it for the first time during their teenage years.

This booklet is designed to help you guide your teenager through their likely experimentation with alcohol.

Drinking alcohol in a public place is illegal for young people under 18 years if they aren't in the presence of a parent or guardian.

Serving alcohol to under 18s is also against the law if you aren't their parent or guardian. If you do, without the authorisation of the minor's parent or guardian, you could have to pay a fine of \$11,000 for each underage person you serve.

TEENAGERS AND ALCOHOL

Teenagers drink alcohol for the same reason adults do – to socialise, relax or change their state of mind.

Some teenagers also like to experiment and get drunk. For many, this is seen as something of an 'initiation' into adulthood.

Alcohol makes teenagers more confident, more willing to try new things and more sociable. It also makes them bigger risk takers and more likely to get involved in a fight or an accident.

As a parent, you might think you've 'been there, done that' and that a little bit of teenage experimentation with alcohol is okay.

But things have changed.

Although most teenagers remain responsible and many choose not to drink, research shows that an increasing number of them are drinking at more risky levels than they were 20 years ago.

Not only are the drinks teenagers consume much stronger (eg. spirits instead of cask wine or beer), but they are now drinking more in a shorter space of time.

This 'binge' drinking trend (ie. drinking heavily over a short period of time) is causing long term psychological effects as well as physical damage.

For example, some women in their twenties are now presenting with liver damage as a result of excessive alcohol consumption during their teenage years.

Young people are at greatest risk of immediate harm from the misuse of alcohol. The three leading causes of death among adolescents – unintentional injuries, homicide and suicide – are all associated with alcohol.

National Alcohol Strategy 2003

How does it affect them?

Alcohol is a depressant drug which acts to slow down the nervous system and inhibit the brain's functions.

The effect of alcohol on teenagers however is different to adults.

Teenagers:

- are able to stay awake and drink for longer than adults.
- seem to be more sensitive to learning and memory problems from alcohol.
- drink much less to feel the same effects.

Teenagers often drink just to get drunk. The results can be significant and include:

- a loss of inhibitions and decision making skills – leaving them vulnerable to accidents, physical attack and sexual coercion
- driving while under the influence – endangering themselves and others
- an increase in risky behaviour – such as unsafe sex and mixing drugs
- making regular activities dangerous – such as skateboarding, swimming, driving and playing sports
- alcohol poisoning – when their bodies start to shut down after a heavy drinking session
- blackouts – when they faint or lose their memory

Research shows that the younger the drinking starts the more likely it is that there will be problems in the future.

Drinking at an early age can also affect social development, influencing the way young people deal with problems.

For example, they may spend their time drinking rather than participating in sport or other activities or they may turn to alcohol whenever they feel a little down.



TEENAGERS AND ALCOHOL

Where do they get it from?

When teenagers decide they want to drink alcohol they will always find it somewhere.

The most common source of alcohol for teenagers is their parents.

It may also be from an older friend, from a friend's parents or even stolen from their parent's supplies in the home.

And even though it's illegal to sell alcohol to people under 18, they are still able to buy it in some bottle shops and hotels.

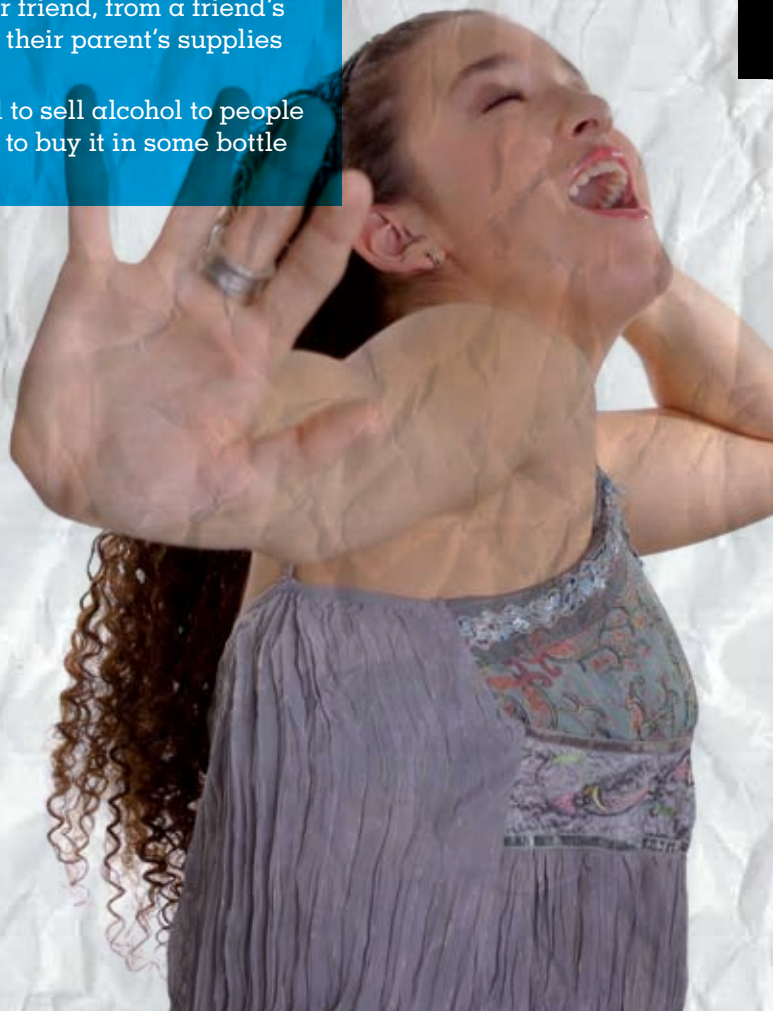
What happens if they mix alcohol with drugs?

Mixing alcohol with drugs – whether illegal, over-the-counter or prescription – can be dangerous and unpredictable.

Alcohol can also stop medicines from working properly and can make the negative effects of the drug worse.

"My mum drank when she was my age, so why should it be a problem for me? She's just being a hypocrite!"

Felicity, 17



THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A PARENT

Adolescence is a complex time for both parents and teenagers.

It is a balancing act for parents to ensure the safety of their teenager, and at the same time, provide them with opportunities to grow and take more responsibility.

Communicating with your teenager is vital during this period as they become more exposed to alcohol – through their mates, peers and the media.

Although you cannot control these sources of information, open and ongoing communication with your teenager about alcohol – providing them with the skills and attitude to make informed choices – can really help.

Avoid discussing issues when they're drunk and/or you're angry. Give time for them to sober up and you to cool down first.

It is important to:

- Be patient – some teenagers have trouble expressing themselves.
- Listen – hear what they have to say, without interrupting.
- Help teenagers think for themselves – encourage them to talk through the consequences of their actions.
- Be a good role model – your attitude towards alcohol is likely to influence theirs.
- Work with them, not against them – your teenager is more likely to follow direction if they are consulted first.
- Stay informed – ensure you are armed with the latest facts about alcohol before talking with your teenager.
- Advise them of the legal ramifications of underage drinking – for information refer to sites such as www.lawstuff.org.au

ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBILITY AROUND ALCOHOL

Teenagers generally don't like rules or being told what to do. They have less problems with tips and guidelines – delivered in a supportive and understanding way.

Tips for you

Alcohol is a part of Australian culture and it is likely that your teenager will try it at some stage during adolescence and beyond.

Advise your teenager not to drink alcohol if they are under 18. Also prepare for them for the future and ensure they are adequately informed about sensible drinking habits and the dangers of binge drinking.

- If they are under 18, make it clear to them that underage drinking is illegal and can attract large fines if they are found drinking on licensed premises or in public places.

- Learn as much as you can about alcohol and its effects on young people.
- Try to understand, not judge.
- Get to know your teenager's friends and their partying habits. Teenagers tend to be very loyal and respect the views of their mates.
- If they get into trouble or overindulge, support them through their recovery, subtly pointing out how they could do things differently next time.
- If you drink, be honest about your own alcohol habits, and maybe talk about how you 'survived' your teenage years

and what you would do differently.

- Ensure you are always contactable in case of an emergency, making it clear to your teenager that their safety is your priority.



"My daughter was really out of control at one point, but after we sat down and talked, and I told her about some of my experiences with alcohol, things started to improve. She seemed to trust me a bit more or something"

Robyn, mother of three

Tips for them (if they drink alcohol)

When your teenager is planning a big night out let them know they can have a good time without alcohol. If they are likely to consume alcohol encourage them to follow these tips to have a better and safer time.

Before

- Have something to eat.
- Leave the car behind.
- Nominate a non-drinker to drive if someone plans to drive.
- Make sure you have enough money for a cab fare home.
- Set a limit on how many drinks you'll have before you start and stick to it.

During

- Start your night with a non-alcoholic drink.
- Drink water, soft drinks or juice between alcoholic drinks.
- Choose low alcohol drinks – avoid straight spirits, shots and cocktails.
- Avoid rounds or shouts.
- Avoid mixing your drinks (if you start on beer stick to it).
- Eat something (but avoid salty snacks that make you thirsty).
- Watch your drink – drink spiking includes double shots and happens mostly in homes or at parties by someone you know.
- Dance or move around.
- If you leave, tell your mates where you're going and who with.
- Look after your mates and never leave a drunk mate on their own.

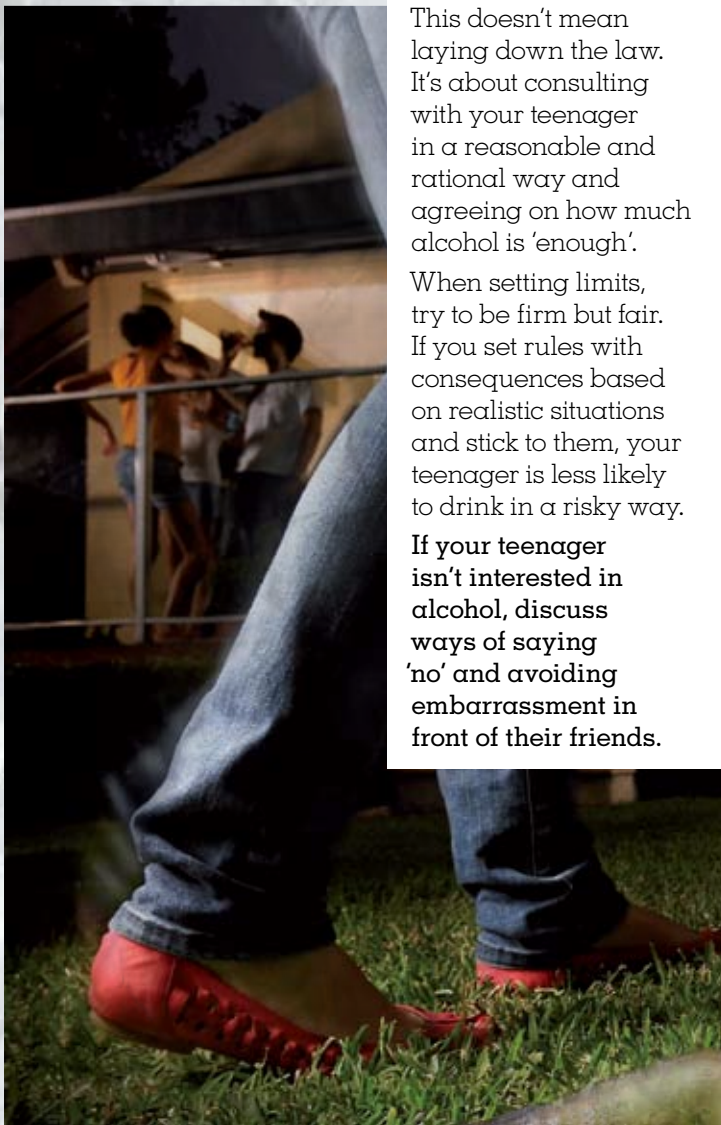
After

- Never drive if you've been drinking.
 - Never accept a ride from someone who has been drinking – catch a cab or stay with friends instead.
 - Drink plenty of water before you go to bed. This will lessen the effects of a hangover.
 - Hang out with people who will look after you if you get into trouble.
- If teenagers are under 18 and drinking alcohol in a public place without the presence of their parent or guardian they are breaking the law.

SET

BOUNDARIES

The best advice you can give your under 18 son or daughter is to avoid drinking alcohol. If you accept that your teenager may drink (be it in front of you or when you're not around), it is often appropriate to set some boundaries, rather than enforce a no drinking 'rule'.



This doesn't mean laying down the law. It's about consulting with your teenager in a reasonable and rational way and agreeing on how much alcohol is 'enough'.

When setting limits, try to be firm but fair. If you set rules with consequences based on realistic situations and stick to them, your teenager is less likely to drink in a risky way.

If your teenager isn't interested in alcohol, discuss ways of saying 'no' and avoiding embarrassment in front of their friends.

"When I drink it makes me feel good and I have fun with my mates. My mum and dad don't get it."

Steve, 16

BE A GOOD

ROLE MODEL

The attitudes and actions of teenagers are often heavily influenced by what they see and hear at home.

"My daughter was offered some top shelf scotch at the teenage party she went to. Where do the kids get the money from to buy this stuff? From their parents?"

Noel, father of two

If you choose to discuss your own alcohol use with your teenager it is important not to glorify your own behaviour. Be careful not to sound hypocritical. If you drink, try to avoid getting drunk in front of them.

Encourage your teenager to be open with you about their feelings and develop strategies that will help them deal with difficult situations involving alcohol.

If you are offering your teenager a beer or wine over dinner, be aware that problem drinking in later life has been linked to drinking at an early age.

Similarly, sending them off to a party with a bottle or two from your own reserves will not necessarily stop them from drinking more when they get there.

Drinks from home often serve as no more than a 'starter' pack, before they get into the more serious stuff.

In Australia, alcohol is responsible for the majority of hospitalisations for people aged between 15 and 34.

- taken from Set to Celebrate resource

KNOW THE LAW

What you should know

- It is illegal to supply alcohol to anyone under 18 unless you are their parent or guardian. This law applies at all times, whether you are in your own home or in a public place, including parks or beaches.
- If you do you could face a fine of \$11,000 for each minor supplied, and/or 12 months gaol.

What they should know

- If your teenager is under 18 and caught drinking alcohol on licensed premises he or she could receive a fine of up to \$2,200.
- They can also be fined if they are caught drinking in a public place without their parent or guardian.

Parties at your place

Hosting a party at your place can be a great opportunity to bond with your teenager and become more involved in their life.

You can plan the night together and reach agreement on the following points to ensure everyone has a good time:

While it is legal to serve alcohol to your own child in your own home, it is illegal to serve it to anyone else under 18.

• What food will be available?

Make sure there is plenty of it (including vegetarian options).

• What sort of drinks will be served, and by whom?

Make sure plenty of water and non-alcoholic drinks are available.

• If you decide on an alcohol free party, how will you handle guests who turn up with alcohol?

You may wish to confiscate the alcohol and return it as the guest is leaving. If they are under 18 you could contact their parents who may collect it later.

• How will you handle gatecrashers?

Have one point of entry and enlist adults (possibly older brothers and sisters) to assist with crowd management.

• What should you do in an emergency?

Have emergency numbers handy.

• How will the guests get home?

Encourage parents to pick up their teenagers.

• What time will the party finish?

Have the finishing time on the invitation.

Planning is the key to a good night.

Where possible, ensure invitations are sent. They help to keep a party in control (ie. 'no invite, no entry').

If there are any potential troublemakers coming, either cross them off the list or make plans to keep them in line.

Let your neighbours know when you are having a party and inform the local police.



STEPPING OUT

Parties and holidays away

It is understandable that you might be a little concerned when your son or daughter goes to a party or on a holiday for the first time without you.

Events such as Schoolies Week attract a lot of negative media attention and gatecrashers at parties are becoming more common.

In giving advice to your teenager, there is a fine line between appearing genuinely concerned for their safety and nagging.

It helps if you discuss things with them as you would another adult.

Tips

- Agree on some basic ground rules before they leave (eg. they won't be drinking alcohol or how much they will drink, how they will get home and at what time, what they should do in an emergency etc).
- Ensure they are able to contact you if necessary, and you them.
- If they are going to a party, contact the host's parents to discuss what's being planned.
- If they are going away, ask them where they are going and who with. Try to contact at least one of the parents of the group.
- Give them some emergency money (for taxi fares, the bus/train ride home etc).

Parties and holidays are often very important in a teenager's life. They can be seen as events that mark the move from childhood to adulthood.

"My daughter's friend passed out at a party recently. Thankfully my daughter had the sense to call her parents. Their friends were against it because they thought she'd get into trouble with her parents!"

*Sonya,
mother of four*

INTERESTING

FACTS

True

- Eating slows the absorption of alcohol into your body.
- Alcohol can stay in your system well into the next day – meaning you could still be over the limit if you drive somewhere after you wake up.
- Cocktails can contain as many as five or more standard drinks.
- The human liver can only process about one alcoholic drink per hour.
- Smoking cannabis (also known as dope or weed) can cause a person to drink more than they normally would.
- Alcohol reduces your ability to know how fast you are driving.

False

- Feeding bread to a drunk person will sober them up.
- Coffee, vomiting or a cold shower speeds up the time it takes to remove alcohol from your body.
- A headache tablet will make your hangover go away.

