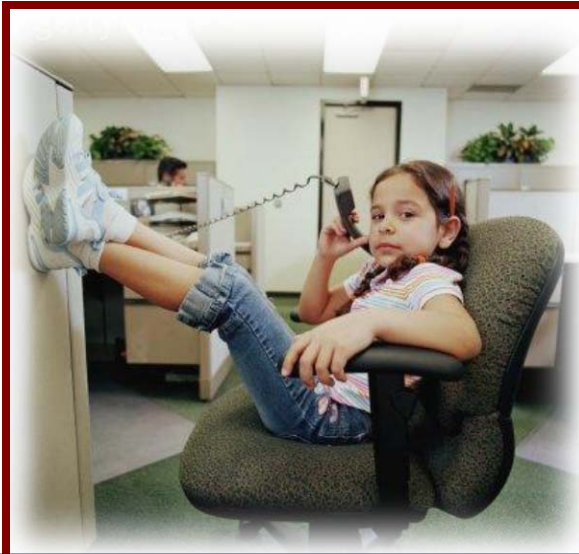


# Alcoholhelp

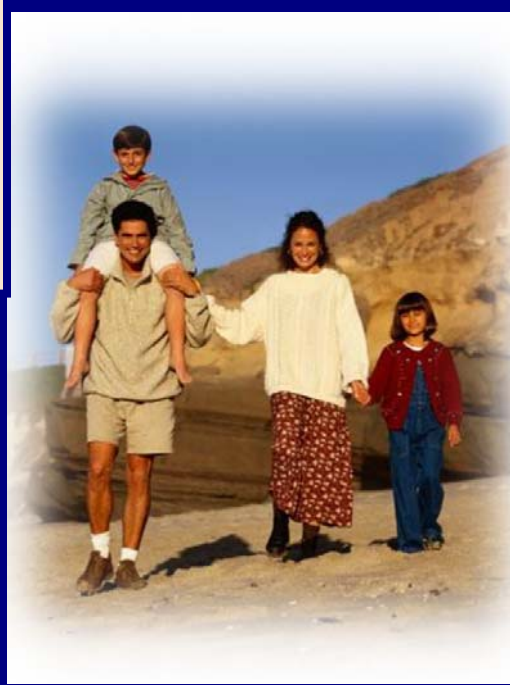
## CHILDREN and ALCOHOL

### Parents Make A Difference



**Talk** to your child about

*Alcohol*



[www.alcoholhelp.com](http://www.alcoholhelp.com)

Registered Charity No:1104811

# INTRODUCTION

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET

- Alcohol is the UK's number one drug of choice. It is both widely used and abused.
- Learning about alcohol is imperative to making informed and appropriate decisions regarding alcohol and its use. As in other important areas of life, parents have a vital role in teaching their children.
- The home is where most young people are introduced to alcohol.
- Parents model drinking behaviour for their children and pass on their attitudes. Though they may not realise it, parents form a key function in teaching their children about alcohol.
- By equipping themselves with accurate information about alcohol, parents can feel confident they will carry out this function well and be in a better position to really help their children.

The information contained in this booklet is designed to give you, the parents, some basic facts and “dos and don'ts” that may help you to shape your children's attitude to alcohol.

The lessons that Alcohhelp provide to your children are designed to present the scientific facts on alcohol and its impact on the body. We leave it to the child to form their own opinion on the rights and wrongs of using alcohol. This opinion must be formed with your help. Your thoughts and attitudes to this are crucial to help your child develop a sensible attitude toward alcohol.

## **“AT WHAT AGE SHOULD I TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT ALCOHOL?”**

**It's** never too early to start talking with your child about drinking. Some children start asking questions when they're four or five years old. Many parents make the mistake of waiting until their child has begun drinking – but if you listen and respond to your child sensitively, you may be able to prevent problems from developing later

Children learn about alcohol from a very early age and are forming attitudes about drinking from as young as 5 years old. By the age of 7 most children have already tasted alcohol and between the ages of 10 and 13 most children have had their first alcoholic drink. Most adolescents drink occasionally and moderately especially in their early teens, and at around 16, both sexes begin to drink more heavily.

Many parents wonder when they should talk to their children about alcohol, if at all. Children often ask about alcohol and drinking when they are very young, and when this happens a positive response is better than simply ducking the issue. Many parents do not see the need to raise the subject until their children reach their teens – when they apparently start drinking alcohol. Ideally you should talk to your child about drinking before he or she is likely to experiment with alcohol.

Some parents say that because alcohol is a legal drug, it's hard for them to think of it as dangerous. Other parents find it difficult to talk about alcohol because they drink. Yet, alcohol is the drug most often used by young people and the consequences of its use can be harmful to your child in many ways.

By the age of eleven, 1 in 25 boys claimed to be consuming alcohol at least once a week. By fourteen, 79% of boys and 81% of girls had experimented with alcohol

White and Afro Caribbean children are most likely to have tried alcohol (82% and 72% respectively)

Drinking alcohol with parents was the most common setting in which young people consumed alcohol – around half said they drank with their parents and/or at home

*(Source: Portman Group – 'Alcohol Education and Primary Schools')*

# YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Early adolescence is a time of enormous and often confusing changes for your child, which makes it a challenging time for both your youngster and you. Being tuned in to what it's like to be a teen can help you stay closer to your child and have more influence on the choices he or she makes—including decisions about using alcohol.

## **Physical Changes**

The majority of 10 to 14 year-olds experience rapid increases in height and weight as well as the beginnings of sexual development. As a result, many kids feel more self-conscious about their bodies than they did when they were younger and begin to question whether they are “good enough” - tall enough, slender enough, strong enough, attractive enough, compared with others. A young teen who feels he or she doesn't measure up in some way is more likely to do things to try to please friends, including experimenting with alcohol. During this vulnerable time, it is particularly important to let your children know that in your eyes, they do measure up and that you care about them deeply.

## **Thinking Skills**

Most young teens are still very “now” oriented and are just beginning to understand that their actions—such as drinking—have consequences. They also tend to believe that bad things won't happen to them, which helps to explain why they often take risks. Therefore, it is very important for adults to invest time in helping kids understand how and why alcohol-related risks do apply to them.

## **Social and Emotional Changes**

As children approach adolescence, friends and “fitting in” become extremely important. Young teens increasingly look to friends and the media for clues on how to behave and begin to question adults' values and rules. Given these normal developments, it is perhaps not surprising that parents often experience conflict with their kids as they go through early adolescence. During this sometimes stormy time, perhaps your toughest challenge is to try to respect your child's growing drive for independence while still providing support and appropriate limits.

## **The Challenge: Coping with New Independence**

**As** the parent of a pre-teen, you have a special opportunity. Your child is at the “in-between” age - old enough to understand many adult subjects, but still young enough to accept your guidance willingly. This is a time when you can openly discuss the dangers of drinking with your child and prepare him or her to resist the pressure to drink that will come in the near future.

No matter what the age of your children, they are more likely to talk with you about problems – about alcohol or other drug use as well as other important issues, if they feel you really listen. Sometimes, just listening to your child shows more concern than trying to give too much advice, being critical or treating your child’s problems too lightly.

Try never to be judgmental or hypocritical about alcohol and remember that your own drinking behaviour heavily influences how well your child will observe the household rules that you establish. It’s OK to drink in front of your of your child, but be aware that your child will observe how and when you drink. For example, do not use alcohol to reduce tension or celebrate. Do not drive after drinking.

Monitoring the quantity and frequency of your drinking as well as being sure that you don’t drink and then engage in potentially dangerous activities all set good examples for your child.

Other ways that you can be a good role model are to:

- Always provide non-alcoholic drinks at parties in your home for guests that prefer them,
- Show that drinking is not the focus of activity,
- Discourage drunken behaviour,
- Make sure that friends impaired by alcohol don’t drive themselves home.

Get to know your child’s friends. Some of them may think that drinking isn’t a problem and their parents may not have the information that you now do. They may allow their children to drink and may allow parties in their homes where children have access to alcohol. If your child has been invited to a party at the home of a friend you don’t know, call the friend’s parents ahead of time to be sure that adults will be present.

Ask their attitudes about alcohol before you make a decision about allowing your child to attend.

In spite of your best efforts your child will see and hear many “mixed messages” about drinking through advertising, television programs and films. Estimates are that children will see over 75,000 drinking scenes before they turn 18 but they still won’t know much about alcoholic beverages or the serious health problems that they can cause. Most children do not understand that servings of distilled spirits, wine, beer and alcopops all contain the same amount of alcohol. You need to explain to them that beer or alcopops – often favourites with youngsters, can get them just as drunk as so called “hard liquor” and do the same damage to the body.

Continue to educate your child about the importance of maintaining good health – psychological, emotional and physical. You can be your child’s best teacher. Even if your child’s school offers an alcohol and drug education as part of their curriculum, your child needs consistent information and support at home as well as in school. Your willingness to listen to your child’s problems and feelings will help them develop a sense of confidence in themselves. It will help develop their coping skills they need for dealing with anger, stress, loneliness and disappointment without turning to alcohol.

Children do pressure others their age to drink. Your child needs to know that he or she doesn’t have to do something – including drink – just because they think “everybody is doing it”. Pre-teens often believe that more kids their own age drink than who actually do. Helping your own child learn that he or she can make their own decisions – about clothes, sports or other activities they enjoy – even if “everybody isn’t doing it” will help him or her in making the decision not to drink.

## **THE BOTTOM LINE: A STRONG PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP**

**You** may wonder why a guide to preventing children starting to use alcohol is putting so much emphasis on parents' need to understand and support their children. But the fact is the best way to influence your child to avoid drinking is to have a strong, trusting relationship with him or her. Research shows that children are much more likely to delay drinking when they feel they have a close, supportive tie with a parent or guardian. Moreover, if your son or daughter eventually does begin to drink, a good relationship with you will help protect him or her from developing alcohol-related problems.

The opposite is also true: When the relationship between a parent and child is full of conflict or is very distant, the child is more likely to use alcohol and to develop drinking-related problems. This connection between the parent-child relationship and a child's drinking habits makes a lot of sense when you think about it. First, when children have a strong bond with a parent, they are apt to feel good about themselves and therefore be less likely to cave in to peer pressure to use alcohol. Secondly, a good relationship with you is likely to influence your children to try to live up to your expectations, because they want to maintain their close tie with you.

- Establish open communication. Make it easy for your teenager to talk honestly with you. Show you care. Even though children may not always show it, they still need to know they are important to their parents. Make it a point to regularly spend one-on-one time with your child—time when you can give him or her your loving, undivided attention. Share activities.
- Draw the line. Set clear, realistic expectations for your child's behaviour. Establish appropriate consequences for breaking rules and consistently enforce them.
- Offer acceptance. Make sure your child knows that you appreciate his or her efforts as well as accomplishments. Avoid hurtful teasing or criticism.
- Understand that your child is growing up. This doesn't mean a hands-off attitude. But as you guide your child's behaviour, also make an effort to respect his or her growing need for independence and privacy.

## YOUNG TEENS AND ALCOHOL: THE RISKS

**For** young people, alcohol is the number one drug of choice. In fact, teens use alcohol more frequently and heavily than all other illicit drugs *combined*. Although most children under age 14 have not yet begun to drink, early adolescence is a time of special risk for beginning to experiment with alcohol.

While some parents and guardians may feel relieved that their teen is “only” drinking, it is important to remember that alcohol is a powerful, mood-altering drug. Not only does alcohol affect the mind and body in often-unpredictable ways, but teens lack the judgment and coping skills to handle alcohol wisely. As a result:

- Alcohol-related traffic crashes are a major cause of death among teens. Alcohol use also is linked with youthful deaths by drowning & suicide.
- Teens who use alcohol are more likely to become sexually active at earlier ages, to have sexual intercourse more often, and to have unprotected sex than teens who do not drink.
- Young people who drink are more likely than others to be victims of violent crime, including rape, aggravated assault, and robbery.
- Teens who drink are more likely to have problems with school work and school conduct.
- An individual who begins drinking as a young teen is *four times* more likely to develop alcohol dependence than someone who waits until adulthood to use alcohol.

**The message is clear:** Alcohol use is very risky business for young people. And the longer children delay alcohol use, the less likely they are to develop any problems associated with it. That’s why it is so important to help your child avoid any alcohol use.



## **SIGNS OF ALCOHOL MISUSE - WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

- 1. Family:** deteriorating relationships with family; behaviour changes, such as withdrawal or hostility
- 2. School:** truancy; drop in grades; behaviour problems
- 3. Social Life:** deteriorating relationships with old school friends; developing a new network of friends who are using alcohol or drugs; loss of interest in sports or other favourite activities
- 4. Emotional Life:** basic personality changes; inexplicable and sudden mood changes; apathy
- 5. Physical:** memory problems, fatigue or hyper behaviour; difficulty walking; sleep disturbances; red, blood-shot eyes; carelessness with grooming
- 6. Physical Evidence:** disappearance of beer or liquor supply; money or valuables missing; use of cigarettes; use of incense; excess money or missing money

## **ACTION CHECKLIST**

### **WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?**

- 1. Establish and Maintain Good Communication** – talk with your child about alcohol facts, reasons not to drink and ways to avoid drinking in difficult situations
- 2. Make Clear Rules and enforce them with consistency and mild consequences**
- 3. Be a Positive Role Model** – set a good example regarding your own alcohol use
- 4. Appreciate Your Child's Individuality**
- 5. Help Children deal with Peer Pressure and Media Messages**
- 6. Monitor your Children's Activities**
- 7. Believe in your own powers to help your child avoid alcohol use**

# FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL

## 1. Types of Drinkers

- i) **Non-Drinker** - nearly one third of the population are non-drinkers. Some for religious reasons, others choose not to drink for health reasons. Others just don't like the taste or effects of alcohol.
- ii) **Social Drinkers** -the vast majority . They drink moderately, at a predictable rate, usually in the company of others.
- iii) **Binge Drinkers** - while normally a social drinker or sometimes a heavy drinker, on isolated occasions the binge drinker chooses to severely abuse alcohol.
- iv) **Heavy Drinker** - just about everybody knows a heavy drinker who can drink large amount of alcohol with ease, and seemingly with little or no bad effects. Drinking is an important part of their lives; heavy drinkers still have some control over their drinking.
- v) **Alcoholic** - about 10% of drinkers are alcoholics. Alcoholism is a disease whose main symptom is uncontrolled drinking. The alcoholic is actually addicted to alcohol and depends on it to function.

- 2. One out of every two people will be in an alcohol related motoring accident in their lifetime.
- 3. Drinking large amounts over long periods of time can result in serious even fatal illnesses. Since alcohol is toxic, heavy drinking can lead to cirrhosis of the liver, heart disease, ulcers, cancer, malnutrition and irreversible brain damage.
- 4. The average life expectancy for an alcoholic is 52 years.
- 5. Some types of drinks preferred by young people are much stronger than average, for example strong beers, alco-pops and ciders. There can be as much alcohol in a 330ml bottle of alco-pop as in a generous shot of whiskey.
- 6. 1000 young people under the age of 15 are admitted to hospital each year with acute alcohol poisoning. All need emergency treatment and some die.