

# You, Your Teenager and Alcohol

A brief guide for parents and carers



# Contents

2. Introduction
  
3. Why it pays to talk to your teenager
  
4. Practical ways to delaying teenage drinking
  
5. Good reasons not to drink / The facts speaks for themselves
  
6. What the Law Says?
  
7. Chief Medical Officer advice / An Adults Guide
  
8. If you want to know more
  
9. Useful Websites / References

This brief guide is prepared by CfED. Information contain within the guide is based on Government and the UK Chief Medical Officers guidelines, and other agencies. The guide also draws on research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Young people, alcohol and influences—A study of young people and their relationship with alcohol June 2011, and other sources.

This guide is prepared in partnership with the Office of Public Health.

# Introduction

This guide is for parents and carers of teenagers from the age of 16 years old. In this guide we will give you the facts and information that you will need to talk to your teenager and help him / her to understand the consequences of drinking alcohol.

You may wonder why a guide for preventing teenage alcohol use is putting so much emphasis on parents and carers need to understand and support their children. The fact is, the best way to influence your teenager is to have a strong, trusting relationship with him / her.

The journey in producing this guide began in November 2012 when a Youth event titled 'Alcohol what's the attraction' was held with twenty two young people in the Brierley Hill area.

Research undertaken at the time showed that an increasing number of young people from the age of twelve upwards were drinking alcohol. Seven key solutions to the problem were identified by young people who attended. These were:

1. The need for more youth ambassadors / role models.
2. Making it more difficult for young people to access alcohol.
3. Raising the price of alcohol.
4. Reducing the number of alcohol promotions within night clubs .
5. Engaging young people in alternative activities to combat boredom .
6. Developing educational campaigns with young people to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking and alcohol abuse.
7. Encouraging dialogue between parents and young people about the dangers of alcohol.

Between October 2013 and June 2014 further work was undertaken with young people attending Stourbridge College which addressed two of the

seven solutions—firstly develop an educational campaign with young people to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking and alcohol abuse, and secondly encouraging dialogue between parents and teenagers about the dangers of alcohol. Young learners at the college designed posters intended to warn peers about the dangers of alcohol. This guide fulfils the second point.

# Why it pays to talk to your teenager

For many parents and carers, bringing up the subject of alcohol is no easy matter. Your teenager may try to dodge the discussion, and you yourself may feel unsure about how to proceed. To make the most of your conversation, take some time to think about the issues you want to discuss before you talk to your teenager.

Drink aware<sup>1</sup> makes a number of suggestions to parents about how to talk about alcohol to teenage children:

- Explain to your children that alcohol is only for adults and that there is a social side to alcohol, but if you drink too much there can be bad consequences for your health and safety.
- If you know your child is drinking, make sure he or she is aware of the risks and give him / her tips to help stay safe. If they're going out, find out who they are with and what they are planning to do.
- Its important to be aware of how accessible alcohol is in your house and not to provide your

teenager with alcohol. But if you do decide to, make sure you give them non-alcoholic drinks too and encourage them to alternate.

- Have a plan. This will make your life easier. Rather than waiting for something bad to happen, think about when and how you are going to start the conversation and keep it going.
- Offer a listening ear, as a parent the worst thing you can say about drinking is nothing at all. Offering a listening ear is just as important as telling your teenager the facts. Reassure them that you will listen to their experiences and won't judge them if they have tried alcohol.
- Teach them that they can say no. Make sure your teenager knows that drinking is a decision. Try talking about ways they can say "no" so they feel confident in that situation.



# Practical ways of delaying teenage drinking



Research shows that the younger a person is when they start to drink regularly, the greater their risk of alcohol-related problems later in life. By highlighting the short term risks of getting drunk, such as being sexually assaulted or robbed, plus the embarrassment of looking a fool in front of their mates, you can help delay the age that your teenager starts drinking and the amount they consume. This is more effective than just saying don't.

## These tips should help:

- Encourage sports, hobbies, clubs and social activities that keep your kids active and fulfilled.
- Establish routines, like mealtimes, that mean you can spend some time together and to talk to each other. This helps your child to feel they can come to you if they have a problem.
- Make sure you know the facts and laws about alcohol and can talk in a balanced and constructive way about the pros and cons of drinking.
- Make sure the ground rules are clear, discuss them with all family members, and be clear about what is allowed and not allowed.
- Have consequences for breaking rules and enforce them such as stopping their allowance or grounding them.
- If your teenager is going to a party, drop them off and pick them up or book a taxi. Agree the time they will be leaving the party.
- Check where they're going and who they're with, and always make sure they've got a fully charged mobile with them.
- Be careful where you leave alcohol in the house. Know how much you have and check it regularly. If you are away for the night it is unfair to your teenagers to leave them in a situation where they have access to a large supply of drink
- Supervise parties at home and always serve food. Be careful how invitations and photos are posted on social media sites and ensure that there is adult supervision at parties in friends' homes.

# Good reasons not to drink

Talking with your teenager about reasons to avoid alcohol, stay away from scare tactics. Most young teens are aware that many people drink without problems, so it is important to discuss the consequences of alcohol use without overstating the case. Some good reasons why teenagers should not drink are:

- **You want your teenager to avoid alcohol.** Clearly state your own expectations about his or her drinking. Your values and attitudes count with your teenager, even though he or she may not always show it.
- **To maintain self-respect.** Teenagers say the best way to persuade them to avoid alcohol is to appeal to their self-respect—let them know that they are too smart and have too much going for them. Teens also are likely to pay attention to examples of how alcohol might lead to embarrassing situations or events—things that might damage their self-respect or alter important relationships.
- **Drinking is illegal.** Because alcohol use under the age of 18 is illegal, getting caught may mean trouble with the authorities.
- **Drinking can be dangerous.** One of the leading causes of teen deaths is motor vehicle crashes involving alcohol. Drinking also makes a young person more vulnerable to sexual assault and unprotected sex. And while your teen may believe he or she wouldn't engage in hazardous activities after drinking, point out that because alcohol impairs judgment, a drinker is very likely to think such activities won't be dangerous.
- **Alcohol affects young people differently from adults.** Drinking while the brain is still maturing may lead to long-lasting intellectual effects and may even increase the likelihood of developing alcohol dependence later in life.

## The Facts speaks for themselves

Studies by the charity Alcohol Concern<sup>2</sup> show that drinking, particularly binge drinking, is on the increase among young people. In one study, 47% of 15-year-olds had drunk alcohol in the previous week. It is also a known fact that young people are more likely to have risky sex (e.g. without contraception, with lots of different partners and unintended sex) when under the influence of alcohol. As many as one in fourteen 15-16 year olds said they'd had unprotected sex after drinking. Up to 40% of sexually active 13-14 year olds were 'drunk' or 'stoned' at first intercourse.

Government statistics show that:

- Over half of 11 to 15 year olds have already tried at least one alcoholic drink with their friends. (NHS reports, Drug use, smoking and alcohol use amongst young people, 2007)
- The proportion of 11 to 15 year olds who have never drunk alcohol has risen in recent years, from 39% in 2003 to 46% in 2007. (NHS report, Drug use, smoking and alcohol use amongst young people, 2007)
- Among 35 European countries, the UK has the third-highest proportion of 15 year olds who have been drunk 10 times or more in the past year. Hibell, B et al (2004) the 2003 European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), CAN, Sweden

# What the Law Says?

The law states the following;

- It's a criminal offence to give alcohol to a child under five (unless it is given by a doctor on health grounds or is given in the case of sickness or for some other urgent reason).
- It's a criminal offence for someone under 18 to buy alcohol or drink alcohol in a pub. It is also a criminal offence for someone to buy alcohol for someone else if the other person is under 18 and the alcohol is to be drunk in a bar or a pub or in the street.
- Anyone working in a pub will be committing a criminal offence if they sell or allow someone under 18 to drink alcohol in a pub. However, they will have a defence if they can prove that they had no reason to suspect that the person was under 18. A young person cannot purchase alcohol but can consume it with a meal.
- If police suspect a person under the age of 18 of possessing alcohol (or something they believe to be alcohol) they can confiscate it. The police can also confiscate alcohol (or what they think may be alcohol) from someone of any age if they suspect some of it has been, or is intended to be, drunk by someone under 18 in a public place. The police can arrest anyone who tries to prevent them confiscating what they believe to be alcohol.



# Chief Medical Officer Advice

The UK Chief Medical Officer<sup>3</sup> recommends that parents or carers should not allow their children to drink alcohol until at least 15 years old.

- Teenagers and their parents and carers are advised that an alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest and best option. However, if children drink alcohol, it should not be until at least the age of 15 years.
- If young people aged 15-17 years consume alcohol it should always be with the guidance of parent or carer or in a supervised environment.
- Parents and young people should be aware that drinking, even at age 15 or older, can be hazardous to health and that not drinking is the healthiest option for young people.
- If 15-17 year olds do consume alcohol they should do so infrequently and certainly on no more than one day a week. Young people aged 15 to 17 years should never exceed recommended Government guidelines.



# An Adult's Guide

The Department of Health<sup>4</sup> guidelines recommend not regularly drinking more than:

- three or four units a day for men
- two or three units a day for women

'Regularly' means every day or most days of the week. The recommended limits are lower for women than for men because women have different amounts of fat, muscle and water in their bodies than men. This affects the way women and men's bodies cope with alcohol. As a result, women are more likely to develop health problems, such as liver disease, at lower levels of alcohol consumption than men.

It is stated on the label of all alcohol drinks how much alcohol they contain. This is expressed as 'percentage alcohol by volume' (% ABV). The packaging should also give the number of units of alcohol the drink contains.

One unit is equal to 10ml by volume or 8g by weight, of pure alcohol – the amount of alcohol an average adult can process in one hour. The number of units of alcohol in different drinks varies, for example:

- one 25ml single measure of spirit (37.5% ABV) is equal to one unit
- a 175ml (standard) glass of red wine (12% ABV) is equal to two units
- a pint of beer (4% ABV) contains 2.3 units
- a pint of cider (4.5% ABV) contains 2.6 units.

## When Not To Drink?

It takes about one hour for your liver to break down one unit of alcohol. The more you drink, the longer it will take for the effects of alcohol to clear. There are times when not drinking alcohol at all is the legal choice. These include the following.

- Before you plan to drive or when you're driving.
- Before or when you're operating machinery or electrical equipment.
- Before or during swimming or other active sports.
- When you're taking certain medicines – always read the patient information leaflet that comes with your medicine and ask your GP or pharmacist for advice.

# If you want to know more...

If you want to know more about alcohol issues, or are worried about your own or your teenager drinking, then there are people who can help. You could also talk to your doctor who can refer you, or the following could help:

## **Local information**

SWITCH-1 Castle Street, Dudley DY1 1LA — 01384 241440 — Young Person's Service  
[www.letstalkdrink.com](http://www.letstalkdrink.com)  
[www.thinkalcohol.com](http://www.thinkalcohol.com)

## **CRI The Atlantic House**

Dudley Road, Lye, West Midlands DY9 8EL  
Tel: 01384 426120

## **ADFAM**

Provides information and advice for families of alcohol and drug users. The website has a list of local family support services  
[www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

## **Drinkline**

If you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call this free helpline in complete confidence. They can put you in touch with your local alcohol advice centre for help and advice  
Tel: 0800 917 8282 (24 hour helpline)

## **Parentline Plus**

Offers support and information for anyone parenting a child, and runs parenting courses.  
Tel: 0808 800 2222  
[www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

# Useful Websites

## For teenagers

Talk About Alcohol—[www.talkaboutalcohol.com](http://www.talkaboutalcohol.com)

The Site—[www.thesite.org](http://www.thesite.org)

Talk to Frank—[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

Young Minds—[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Alateen—[www.al-anonuk.org.uk/alateen](http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk/alateen)

ADFAM—[www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

Addaction—[www.addaction.org.uk](http://www.addaction.org.uk)

## For parents

Talk About Alcohol—[www.talkaboutalcohol.com](http://www.talkaboutalcohol.com)

Drinking and you—[www.drinkingandyou.com](http://www.drinkingandyou.com)

Drink Aware—[www.drinkware.co.uk](http://www.drinkware.co.uk)

Know Your Limits—[www.nhs.uk/livewell/alcohol/pages/alcoholhome.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/alcohol/pages/alcoholhome.aspx)

Family Talk—[www.facebook.com/FamilyTalkUK](http://www.facebook.com/FamilyTalkUK)

Alcohol Concern—[www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)

## References

1. <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/check-the-facts/alcohol-and-your-child/tips-and-advice?target=thirteen-to-seventeen>
2. *Alcohol Concern: Fact Sheet Young People and alcohol, 2011.* [www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)
3. *Chief Medical Officer—Guidance on the consumption of alcohol by children and young people, 2009*
4. *Department of Health—*<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx>





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**Registered Charity Number:** 1114821

**Registered Company Number:** 5745005