

## Alcohol, drugs and young people

*Many parents are concerned about alcohol as well as other drugs as their children grow up, and for good reason. Young people are at greater risk of alcohol-related harm than adults.*

### Research

*Relatively recent research has shown that the brain keeps developing until we're in our mid-twenties, and that alcohol is more harmful than previously thought to young people. Findings include:*

*alcohol exposes teenagers to a greater risk of injury and harm, and doing things they may later regret, than adults*

*teenagers are likely to drink more and take more risks when drinking compared to older people*

*drinking early can cause problems with alcohol later in life and damage the brain.*

*Alcohol contributes to the 3 leading causes of death among young people:*

- *unintentional injuries*
- *homicide*
- *suicide.*

*As a result, parents often feel overwhelmed as their children grow up and they have to deal with issues like alcohol and drugs.*

*Parents can begin discussing alcohol and other drugs with children and young people aged eight years and older. Talking about alcohol and other drugs is an ongoing conversation which will evolve depending on the young person's age or development. Establishing an environment in which young people feel confident to discuss alcohol and other drugs with parents or carers is an important protective factor against substance use.*

*Research shows that young people view their parents as credible sources of information and are affected by parental beliefs and behaviour. Starting this conversation means parents can create an understanding that when it comes to alcohol and other drugs, no question is too silly and no topic is off limits.*

*Studies show that risky drinking is most prevalent in your 20s, so preparing young people for this phase of their life is as important as preparing them for their teenage years. You don't need to share your past experiences with alcohol and drugs. However, demonstrating the responsible*

*consumption of alcohol as a parent can mean your child or teenager is more likely to do the same later in life.*

### Having the Talk

There is no set formula for talking to young people about alcohol and other drugs, but the following guidance might make it easier.

#### Get the facts

There are a lot of myths about alcohol and other drugs. Use evidence-based sources like the drug facts section of this website to inform yourself and provide them with the most accurate information.

#### Be clear in your beliefs

Based on the evidence, clarify your own personal view of alcohol and other drugs. For example, when talking about alcohol consumption consider the Australian alcohol guidelines which state that the safest option for people under 18 is not to drink.

#### Look for opportunities to start the conversation

Keep the conversation relaxed. Use relevant topics on the TV and radio, or an upcoming party, as an opportunity to talk about alcohol and drugs. Try to have the conversation in a quiet and comfortable environment e.g. the family dinner table.

#### Ask questions

Find out about their views on alcohol and other drugs. Talk about what they would do in different situations.

#### Make sure they understand the harms

Go to <https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/> to make sure they have the right information about alcohol and drugs and correct any myths. It's about a deeper discussion than 'just say no'. Talk about the benefits as well as the harms of different drugs, and reasons why someone might use them. Don't exaggerate the harms as it will make you sound less credible.

#### Set rules and consequences

Explain your views on alcohol and other drugs and use the facts to back them up. Let them know your rules, and the consequences for breaking them. Help them develop ways of managing situations where their friends are using alcohol or drugs and they don't want to be embarrassed by not taking part.

Source: Alcohol and Drug Foundation  
<https://adf.org.au/>