

Why let drink decide?

The facts about young people and alcohol

Young people have a lot of difficult decisions to make in life, and it's hard enough for them to know what the right thing is to do. Drinking alcohol impairs their ability to make the right choices, and leaves them vulnerable to dangerous situations. This is an issue which affects all of society, but by talking to their children at the earliest opportunity, parents can help them develop a safe and sensible attitude to alcohol.

Although the number of young people drinking in England is falling and the majority do not binge drink, drinking for under 18s can be very risky.¹ Recently, the Chief Medical Officer for England launched official guidance around young people and alcohol which advises parents not to let their child drink alcohol before the age of 15, and that after 15 they should drink rarely and only small amounts.

Following extensive research amongst parents and young people, a new campaign from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) aims to advise young people and their families about the risks associated with alcohol, and give guidance to parents on how to broach the subject with their child.

Parents and young people can find out more information at direct.gov.uk/whyletdrinkdecide



New research shows that parents worry more about their children having unwanted pregnancies, road traffic accidents and taking drugs than they do about their children drinking alcohol.² This is despite evidence showing alcohol is often the link between young people and these risky behaviours.

The sooner parents talk to their children about alcohol and give them the right information from an early age, the less chance that drink will start making decisions for them.



10,000 young people, most of them under 16, are admitted to hospital every year because of drinking³



In a survey of 15 and 16 year olds, 9% of boys and 12% of girls old say they had unprotected sex after drinking alcohol⁴



Young people who start drinking at 13 or younger are three times more likely to go on to use drugs than other children⁵



The main source of alcohol for 10-17 years olds is their parents (48%), friends (29%), and pubs and bars (22%)⁶



39% of 10-17 year olds who drank at least once a week have committed a violent offence, 10% have committed drug-related offences 17% have committed criminal damage 34% have committed theft in the past year⁶



One in five (21%) parents have yet to speak with their child about drinking alcohol⁷



Parents have enormous influence

Parents have more influence than they often realise. 80 per cent of young people who felt their parents would disapprove of them drinking have never drunk alcohol.¹ It's important for parents to have a planned approach to talking to their children about alcohol. The 'Why let drink decide?' campaign will help parents to do this by providing them with the right information and advice.

What can parents do?



Timing is important

Parents have a major influence over their child's approach to alcohol, particularly when they are aged between 8-11 years. Talk to them early about alcohol, before drink starts making decisions for them



Don't miss the boat

Most children have already been drinking for a year by the time their parents start talking to them about alcohol so the earlier you start talking, the better. Explain the consequences and dangers before they start experimenting



Negotiate boundaries and rules

Research shows that children are 12 times less likely to drink if their parents have set clear boundaries around alcohol¹



Make the connection

Talk about alcohol in the context of other issues and explain how alcohol can leave them vulnerable to making misguided decisions



Encourage them to talk

Talk about what they have been doing. You don't need to set specific time aside, sometimes little and often can be effective. Raise the topic when drinking appears in the media



Make it relevant

Children are more likely to be affected by the direct consequences of drinking alcohol such as causing accidents or affecting their appearance, weight and fitness. Talk to them about these issues, as well as the longer term effects

Alcohol. It's no joke



Campaign celebrity supporters including **Bill Bailey, Jo Brand, Josie Long** and **Russell Kane** have all featured in hard hitting online videos to show the serious consequences of young people drinking alcohol.

To find out more and watch the videos log onto direct.gov.uk/whyletdrinkdecide

- 1 Smoking, Drinking and Drug use among young people in England in 2008. NHS information centre
- 2 Mumsnet online survey (2009)
- 3 NWPFO (2008) Hospital admissions for alcohol related harm
- 4 2007 ESPAD Report
- 5 Ten Year Prospective Study of Public Health Problems Associated With Early Drinking (Ellikson et al)
- 6 Underage drinking: findings from the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice survey
- 7 DCSF Alcohol Usage & Attitude study (2009)

Between the ages of 11 and 14 curiosity turns to experimenting. Start talking before they start drinking.

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