Fact sheet 2: Teenage drinking – talking to your child

This fact sheet provides tips and conversation starters for parents.

Did you know?
Research shows that how parents communicate with their teenagers can influence their attitudes and behaviours in relation to alcohol.

Key facts
- Even though young people may get information about alcohol and other drugs through television and school drug education, many prefer their parents to be their main source of information.
- Young people whose parents disapprove of teenage drinking tend to delay when they have their first drink of alcohol or drink less or less often.

Special considerations and tips
- Support and encourage positive behaviour.
  Try to avoid focusing on the negatives. Keep in mind that communication is a two-way process that involves listening. Find ways to signal to your teenager that you are interested and willing to listen to his/her ideas – here are some conversation starters:
  ‘How do you feel about…?’
  ‘Did you see [television show] the other night?’
  ‘What do you think about how they handled…?’
- Explain the risks, effects and potential harms.
  It’s important to stick to the facts—don’t make it up or exaggerate. Teenagers tend to ‘tune out’ when they suspect their parents are using ‘scare tactics’.
- Think about how much you drink.
  It is important to show your teenager how to drink responsibly and in moderation.
- Give them good reasons not to drink.
  It’s important to tell your teenager why you don’t want him or her to drink alcohol. Explain the dangerous situations they can get into if they drink, such as accidental injuries, violent behaviours and risky sexual activity. Describe the negative physical effects on their health and appearance, and appeal to their self-image by explaining that alcohol might cause them to do something embarrassing or something they later regret.
- Choose an appropriate time to talk.
  Avoid distractions such as the telephone or television. Some teenagers may not like being approached directly by their parents on matters related to alcohol. You could soften the approach by starting a conversation while doing the washing up or driving somewhere. Watching a television show together can indicate to your teenager that you are taking an interest in him/her, and can provide a great conversation starter.
There are a number of questions that you can ask your teenager about a party they are invited to attend:

- Who is holding the party?
- Where/when is the party being held?
- Will alcohol be available/is alcohol allowed?
- Will the party be supervised? By who? (parents, older siblings etc).
- What time does the party start and finish?
- Do you/your friends need to be dropped off and picked up later?
- Is there an invitation?

Further considerations

Further information/where to get help

For information on the effects of alcohol and other drugs:
www.druginfo.adf.org.au

Some of the harms associated with teenage drinking:
Fact sheet 1: Alcohol and adolescent development
Useful guidelines:
Fact sheet 3: Standard drinks and reducing the risks of alcohol

Help your teenager deal with peer pressure.

Adolescence is a time of enormous change for young people, and this can leave your teenager feeling quite vulnerable. Your support can help him/her develop confidence to deal with things like peer pressure. Where possible, help your teenager feel comfortable with the idea that it is okay not to drink, or to say ‘no’. A good way to begin might be to role-play some typical scenarios and then give your teenager examples of what he/she could say or do:

**What to say**

‘No, thanks. I’m not into alcohol / It’s not my thing.’
‘I don’t feel like it at the moment.’
‘I’d rather have a soft drink.’

**What to do**

‘Lose’ unwanted drinks that are given to you. Put it down and walk away after a while (but be wary of leaving a drink unattended as drink spiking may be an issue).

Try to stay away from people who give you a hard time about not drinking.

Hang out with other friends who aren’t into drinking.

School A to Z

Education and wellbeing resources for parents, from the
NSW Department of Education and Communities.

ReachOut

Resources and information written for young people.
www.reachout.com

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