

ALCOHOL

Alcohol consumption among teenagers is the norm rather than the exception

A recent survey found that between 30 and 40 per cent of year 8's and 9's have been involved in binge drinking. By the age of 14 years 90 per cent of young people have drunk alcohol. Disturbingly, many young people drink to get drunk and they put themselves at considerable risk when they do so, including drink driving, unsafe sex and binge drinking.



There is evidence to suggest that many parents believe alcohol is less dangerous than other drugs and have a tolerant view of alcohol usage. There is also some evidence to suggest that the longer teenagers delay their first drink, the less likely they are to become regular drinkers.

BINGE DRINKING

Binge drinking means drinking seven or more standard drinks at a time for males and five standard drinks for females. Binge drinking can lead to serious health concerns. Teenage brains are still developing and the areas of the brain that are undergoing the most dramatic changes during the teenage years are the frontal lobe and hippocampus. These areas are associated with motivation, impulse control and addiction.

Long term binge drinking can lead to a range of disorders, collectively known as alcohol related brain damage. Symptoms can include learning and memory problems, and difficulties with balance.

Findings from Australia and overseas suggest that parent attitudes and behaviours have a significant influence on teenage drinking. Parental disapproval, supervision and monitoring of drinking are linked with lower levels of alcohol use by young people.

DEVELOPING A RESPONSIBLE APPROACH TO ALCOHOL

It can be difficult at times to prevent a young person from drinking but parents can encourage sensible drinking habits. Here are some ideas:

- Be a good role model. Drink in moderation, have alcohol free celebrations and avoid drinking before driving.
- Discuss the negative aspects of excessive drinking of alcohol including vomiting, hangovers and headaches.
- Talk about the relationship between alcohol and risk-taking behaviour such as unsafe sex, fighting and even drowning.
- Teach them how to drink safely and sensibly. Pacing themselves, alternating alcohol with non-alcoholic drinks and eating before and while drinking are useful strategies to teach

young people.

- Give them the facts about drinking rather than use scare tactics.
- Help young people develop ways of saying No to their friends' invitations to drink and still maintain face.

KEEP IN MIND

1. A healthy lifestyle that involves regular exercise helps reduce the likelihood of excessive drinking.
2. Limits and boundaries, parent monitoring and disapproval are associated with responsible drinking habits.
3. Make sure you give balanced messages about drinking, including tips about how to drink safely and sensibly.



Parentingideas
MICHAEL GROSE