

# PARENTS, CHILDREN AND ALCOHOL

KEY FINDINGS 2015-2017

NATIONAL PARENTAL ATTITUDES  
TOWARDS UNDERAGE DRINKING

A REPORT COMMISSIONED BY

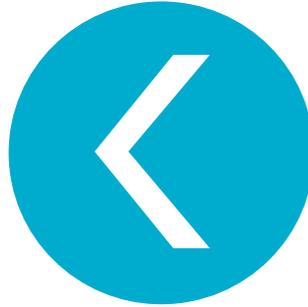
**DRINKAWARE**

## < RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

Drinkaware is an independent not-for-profit with a vision of an Ireland where alcohol is not misused. Our mission is to work with others to fundamentally and permanently change attitudes and behaviours so that drinking to excess and drinking underage become unacceptable. We do this by raising awareness, creating understanding and supporting behaviour change through evidence-led education and effective communications to support our work in three key areas, each of which is informed by the research we conduct:



**TACKLING  
UNDERAGE  
DRINKING**



**REDUCING  
ALCOHOL  
MISUSE**



**SUPPORTING  
ALCOHOL  
EDUCATION**

It has been widely reported that early onset drinking is associated with a range of negative outcomes, but equally well documented is the positive influence that parents can exert over their teenager's possible drinking.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Drinkaware recognises that parents are key 'gatekeepers' of adolescent behaviour and therefore have an important role to play in reducing underage drinking.

Through our parents' campaign, we provide research evidence and practical tools to support parents to have timely, informed conversations about alcohol with their children while encouraging them, as role models, to consider their own drinking habits. References for this report and more information on young people and alcohol are available at [drinkaware.ie/parents](http://drinkaware.ie/parents).

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- > To establish significant changes from comparable research conducted in 2015.
- > To clarify if parents fully understand the risks associated with children drinking alcohol.
- > To establish if parents are having conversations with their children about drinking and what the core elements of this conversation may be.
- > To ascertain if parents are accessing information prior to having this conversation and if so who they consider to be trusted sources.
- > To develop a picture on the parental rules on children and alcohol nationally.
- > To establish if parents consider that their drinking habits have any influence on their children's potential future drinking habits.

## RESEARCH SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The research delivered a nationally representative sample of parents of children between the ages of 11 and 15 years and included both mothers and fathers. The sample frame was designed based on Census data on the demographic characteristics of children between the age of 11 and 15 years, accessed via the

Central Statistics Office. This study was carried out by Behaviour & Attitudes, Ireland's largest independent market research company, and was conducted via face-to-face, in-home interviewing. In total, 503 interviews with parents were conducted and all interviewing took place in July 2017.

## < RESEARCH FINDINGS

### KEY HEALTH & SOCIAL CONCERNS FOR PARENTS RELATING TO CHILDREN

The research found that Irish parents of children aged between 11 and 15 years are much less concerned about alcohol use among their children than they are about other health and social issues. Similar to the 2015 research, the results show that parents are not linking adolescent alcohol use with other high-risk behaviours such as illegal drug use, bullying and school performance.

The high ranking of mental health, a new question asked as part of the 2017 research, indicates that this is a rising concern for parents in Ireland.

	Jul '17	Aug '15	% change
Bullying	24%	27%	-3%
Illegal drug use	19%	27%	-8%
Mental health	17%	N/A	N/A
Cyber safety	14%	15%	-1%
Doing well in school	12%	13%	-1%
Alcohol use	6%	8%	-2%
Sexual activity	5%	4%	+1%
Road safety	2%	3%	-1%
Tobacco use	1%	2%	-1%

### TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT ALCOHOL

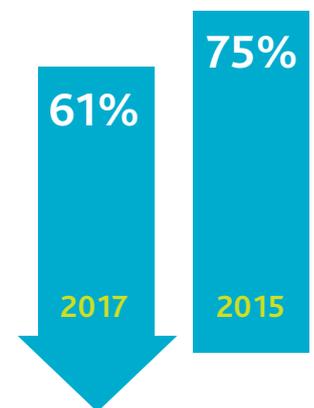
**78%** OF PARENTS SURVEYED HAVE SPOKEN TO THEIR CHILDREN AGED BETWEEN 11 AND 15 YEARS ABOUT ALCOHOL

Parents were asked a series of questions about talking to their children about alcohol. Despite a significant reduction from 2015 (see opposite graphic), parents generally feel confident talking to their children about alcohol, which is reflected in the high incidence of conversations. However, there is little consensus among parents on the age at which to have this conversation and what information it should contain.

A sharp rise was found in the number of parents who consider mental health as the most important topic to include in the conversation about alcohol with their young people, from one in 10 parents in 2015 to one in five in 2017.

With the increasing incidence of drink driving among young people in Ireland in recent years<sup>4</sup>, it is of particular concern that parents appear less likely to discuss the dangers of getting into a car with someone who has consumed alcohol with their young people - 22% in 2015 vs 10% in 2017.

#### PARENTAL CONFIDENCE



OVER HALF (52%) OF PARENTS BELIEVE THEY ARE THE **STRONGEST INFLUENCE** ON THEIR CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS ALCOHOL

ONE-QUARTER OF PARENTS BELIEVE THAT THIS CONVERSATION SHOULD HAPPEN **BEFORE THE AGE OF 12 YEARS**

1 IN 4 PARENTS **HAVE OBTAINED INFORMATION** IN RELATION TO HELPING THEM TALK TO THEIR CHILDREN ABOUT ALCOHOL

## PARENTAL RULES ON ALCOHOL

Research shows that clear and consistent rules and boundaries set by parents in relation to alcohol use are critical to delaying early alcohol consumption<sup>5</sup>. Drinkaware sought a national picture of parental rules on alcohol use at home to establish if there is a consensus.

It is fair to assume that Irish parents are a nation divided when it comes to rules about alcohol, with findings identical to the 2015 research. However, the findings positively indicated that a large proportion of parents had very definite rules about children consuming alcohol before 18 years. The majority of parents discussed these rules with their children and a similar number involved their children in developing both the rules and the consequences for breaking the rules. This is a positive finding as we know that when young people are involved in this decision making process, it can help them to understand and accept the rules and consequences, while providing an opportunity to take responsibility for their own behaviour.<sup>6</sup>

**61% OF PARENTS HAD VERY DEFINITE RULES ABOUT CHILDREN CONSUMING ALCOHOL BEFORE 18 YEARS**

**7 IN 10 PARENTS DISCUSSED THEIR RULES ABOUT ALCOHOL USE WITH THEIR CHILDREN**

**64% OF PARENTS INVOLVED THEIR CHILDREN IN MAKING THE RULES**

## INTRODUCING CHILDREN TO ALCOHOL AT HOME BEFORE 18 YEARS

In Ireland it has become a relatively common practice for parents to allow children to drink alcohol at home under their supervision. It emerged through this research that Irish parents, while having rules, are broadly permissive in relation to their children drinking alcohol at home before the age of 18 years, with 50% of parents considering this practice to be acceptable. Trends emerged including that mothers are more likely to introduce alcohol in the home; this is more common among urban parents and parents of older teenagers (15+).

The graph opposite would suggest that parents are unaware of the potential long-term impact of underage drinking. As well as the negative effects on school performance, mental health and link to illegal drug use, early alcohol use is known to impact on the developing brain.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup> Growing Up in Ireland research findings reveal that starting to drink at an early age is associated with heavier drinking by age 17/18 years<sup>11</sup>, while international research shows that those who drink regularly before the age of 15 years are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence later in life.<sup>12</sup>

### PARENTS WHO DEEM IT ACCEPTABLE FOR THEIR CHILDREN TO DRINK ALCOHOL AT HOME BEFORE 15 YEARS

2017 **14%**

2015 **9%**

REASONS TO INTRODUCE ALCOHOL AT HOME BEFORE 18 YEARS	ANY AGREE
Introduces them to alcohol in a controlled, supervised environment	68%
Takes away the mystery out of alcohol	66%
Helps parents monitor how much they are drinking	65%
Ensure children have a more responsible attitude to alcohol when they drink outside of the home	64%
Improves your young person's ability to tolerate alcohol when they drink outside of the home	52%

The above table shows a wide variety of reasons why Irish parents think it is a sensible option to introduce young people to alcohol at home and it is clear this is happening in homes across the country. In Ireland however, previous research shows that children who were introduced to alcohol, under supervision, within the home are just as likely to binge drink outside of the home.<sup>13</sup>

## PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES



**ALMOST 7 OUT OF 10 PARENTS BELIEVE THAT THEIR OWN DRINKING HABITS INFLUENCE THEIR CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TO ALCOHOL.**

Despite being aware of their influence as parents, children and young teenagers remain exposed to parental drinking.

### OCCASIONS WHERE CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED TO PARENTS DRINKING ALCOHOL



When asked to share alcohol related sentiments that their children were likely to have heard in their home, the findings again indicate that parents are aware of their influence but are perhaps less likely to recognise the impact these messages may have on an influential teenager if exposed to them on a regular basis.<sup>14</sup> As the single strongest influence on young people's attitudes towards alcohol, parents have a crucial role to play in shaping these attitudes.<sup>15</sup>

### ALCOHOL RELATED SENTIMENTS EXPRESSED BY PARENTS

PARENTAL SENTIMENT	ANY AGREE
It's the weekend. I'll have a drink.	40%
Great news! Let's have a drink.	22%
I'm so stressed. I need a drink.	14%
I've had a terrible day. I need a drink.	13%
I'll just have a drink to help me sleep.	5%

## CONCLUSION

Drinkaware will use the key findings from this research to build on their dedicated parents' campaign and inform future programme elements. The focus of this campaign will continue to be on supporting parents to confidently talk to their children about alcohol use, with a view to increasing the age of first drink among young people and, where drinking occurs, reducing the volume of alcohol consumed on drinking occasions.

As in 2015, the research highlights that despite the apparent confidence among parents in discussing alcohol with their children, there are still many issues to address. Some that we will strive to focus on within our campaign are; the age at which to have this conversation, the content to include in the discussion, involving the young people in making the rules and challenging the practice of permitting underage drinking at home under supervision.

## < KEY FINDINGS 2015-2017

		2017	2015	% change
PARENTS WHO OBTAINED INFORMATION TO HELP THEM TALK TO THEIR CHILDREN ABOUT ALCOHOL	Yes	24%	11%	+13%
	No	76%	89%	-13%
PARENTAL CONFIDENCE IN HAVING THIS CONVERSATION	Very Confident	61%	75%	-14%
	Quite Confident	36%	20%	+16%
MOST IMPORTANT TOPICS TO INCLUDE IN THIS CONVERSATION	Alcohol's impact on mental health	20%	9%	+11%
	How alcohol can lead to illegal drug use	17%	11%	+6%
	Alcohol's impact on physical health	13%	8%	+5%
	Never getting into a car with someone who has consumed alcohol	10%	22%	-12%
THE AGE PARENTS FEEL IT IS ACCEPTABLE FOR THEIR CHILDREN TO DRINK ALCOHOL AT HOME	Up to 15 years	14%	9%	+5%
	16 years	14%	21%	-7%
	17 years	22%	22%	-
	18 years	27%	41%	-14%
	18+ years	20%	N/A	N/A

## PARENTAL ATTITUDES

	2017	2015	% change
I think by children's friends are a bigger influence on their decision to drink alcohol than I do as a parent.	62%	75%	-13%
Discussions with young people about the consequences of alcohol use are really only useful if they have begun to experiment with alcohol.	49%	25%	+24%
Children are probably going to drink anyway regardless of conversations and rules set.	65%	N/A	N/A

# DRINKAWARE

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Conducted by:

