

# YOUR CHILDREN AND ALCOHOL

FACTS AND ADVICE TO HELP PARENTS  
START THE CONVERSATION



## DRINKAWARE

# IT CAN BE HARD TO KNOW WHEN TO START TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT ALCOHOL OR EVEN WHAT TO SAY...



## < BUT HERE'S WHY YOU SHOULD

Family members, in particular parents, have been shown to be the single strongest influence of all external factors on young people's attitudes towards drinking.<sup>1</sup> As a parent, you have a unique opportunity to help your child to develop a lifelong healthy attitude towards alcohol use. Parental and family influences are at their strongest at an early age but, as a child gets older, they become more influenced by the world around them – advertising, media and the strong influence of friends and peer groups.<sup>2</sup>

Young Irish people are not drinking any younger or more frequently than their European counterparts, but where they differ is that **Irish students rank significantly higher than students from other countries in the amount of alcohol they consume in one sitting.**<sup>3</sup>

With a range of negative outcomes associated with drinking – and particularly binge drinking – from an early age, **it's important that parents talk to their children about the**

risks associated with underage drinking while they can still shape their attitudes, values and behaviours and help them to make sensible choices about drinking in the future.

**Talking to your child about alcohol shouldn't be a one-off conversation.** It should be an ongoing topic that is revisited when the opportunity presents itself. Use prompts from advertisements, TV programmes or family events to open up a discussion. Gauge how your child's views on alcohol use change over time. The tone and message will change as your child gets older, because the reality is that a teenager does not want to be spoken to in the same way as a younger child.

**It's important to remember that every child is different and not all will drink alcohol before they are of legal age.** Nevertheless, it's still a good idea as a parent to get the information you need to be prepared to have the conversation.

# < WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE DRINK?

As a parent, it's important to understand why your child might start drinking alcohol so you can give them the information and facts they need to make informed decisions and improve their understanding of alcohol. In turn, this will influence their relationship with alcohol in the future. While there is no definitive list of reasons why young people start to drink, here are just some of the possibilities to consider.



**YOUNG PEOPLE DRINK BECAUSE**

THEY THINK IT'S FUN

THEIR FRIENDS ARE DOING IT

THEIR PARENTS ALLOW THEM TO

THEY'RE INFLUENCED BY MEDIA & MARKETING

THEY SEE THEIR PARENTS DRINKING REGULARLY

THEY WANT TO APPEAR MORE MATURE

THEY SEE IT AS A WAY TO ESCAPE THEIR PROBLEMS



# < BUILDING RESILIENCE IN YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people are less likely to develop problems or engage in risky behaviour, like misusing alcohol, if they have resilience.

Young people can feel overwhelmed by all the different things going on in their lives, between family, school, friends and peer groups. Being resilient minimises the effect that stressful situations can have on them and helps them to overcome such difficulties. You can't stop your child from experiencing problems and tough times, but you can play a big role in helping your child be more resilient.

Resilience is the ability to recover and move on from difficult situations and is a necessary skill for coping with life's inevitable obstacles.<sup>5</sup>

**BELOW ARE SOME QUALITIES THAT YOU CAN HELP TO DEVELOP IN YOUR CHILD TO BUILD THEIR RESILIENCE:**

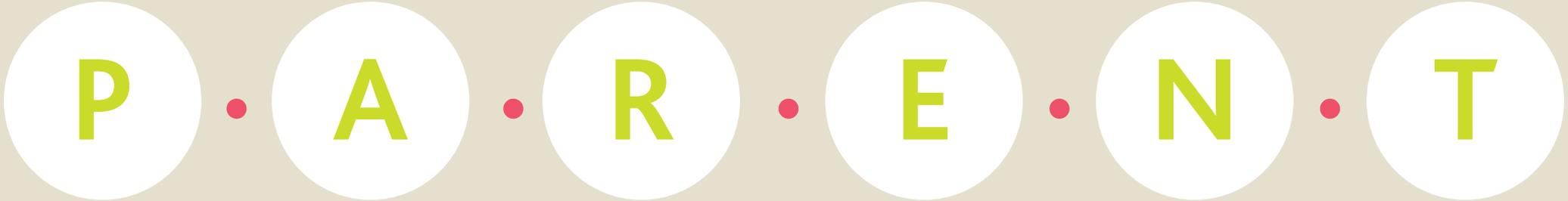
- < Having a positive attitude
- < Being grateful
- < Showing empathy
- < Setting goals
- < Being caring and supportive
- < Having a sense of belonging

**MAKE PLANS TOGETHER. DOWNLOAD OUR ACTIVITIES CALENDAR AT: [DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS/ACTIVITIES](http://DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS/ACTIVITIES)**

**ALMOST 1 IN 5 12-14-YEAR-OLDS HAVE REPORTED BEING DRUNK<sup>4</sup>**



# < YOUR ROLE AS



## PROACTIVE

Be proactive in discussing alcohol with your children. Don't wait for an alcohol-related incident to occur. Having a conversation about alcohol early will help your child to understand alcohol and its effects. Ultimately, this will help them to develop a healthy attitude towards alcohol, giving them the best chance to make sensible choices about drinking in the future.

**Q. HAVE YOU HAD A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT ALCOHOL RECENTLY?**

**Q. DO YOU KNOW YOUR CHILD'S CURRENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS ALCOHOL USE?**

## ACTIVITIES

Encourage sports, hobbies and social activities that keep your child active, healthy and fulfilled. Boredom and having nothing to do is often stated as a reason why some teenagers start drinking. So why not help your child get involved in activities that are of interest to them?

**Q. IS YOUR CHILD INVOLVED IN ONE OR MORE AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITY?**

**Q. ARE THERE OTHER ACTIVITIES THAT YOUR CHILD WOULD BE INTERESTED IN DOING?**

## RULES

Don't be afraid to set rules in relation to alcohol use. Children need boundaries. However, it's important that you clearly communicate your expectations about alcohol with your child and that they know and understand the consequences of breaking those rules. Discussing this openly encourages mutual respect and trust.

**Q. IS YOUR CHILD AWARE OF YOUR RULES IN RELATION TO THEIR ALCOHOL USE?**

**Q. IS YOUR CHILD AWARE OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF BREAKING THOSE RULES?**

## EXAMPLE

The example set by parents with their own drinking affects a child's behaviours and attitudes towards alcohol use.<sup>6</sup> It is useful to think about your own relationship with alcohol and what messages your drinking habits could be sending to your child. Remember, you are the most influential person in your child's life.

**Q. DO YOU OR YOUR PARTNER REGULARLY DRINK IN FRONT OF YOUR CHILD?**

**Q. DO YOU OFTEN EXPRESS THE NEED FOR A DRINK IN FRONT OF YOUR CHILD?**

## NOTICE

Take notice of what is going on in your child's life. Who are their friends? What are their interests? Where are they spending their free time? Parents have a critical role to play in knowing where their children are and who they are with. Getting to know other parents and guardians can also give you a better picture of what is going on in your child's life.

**Q. CAN YOU NAME YOUR CHILD'S THREE BEST FRIENDS?**

**Q. HOW MUCH MONEY DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE ACCESS TO AND WHAT ARE THEY SPENDING IT ON?**

## TALK

Talking matters because effective parenting cannot happen without it. Good communication is the key to building self-esteem and resilience in your child. Communication is a two-way process and accepting that teenagers may see things differently is the first step in discussing issues effectively with them. You may be surprised how much teenagers will confide in you if they feel you are really listening to them.

**Q. ARE YOU ABLE TO DISCUSS ISSUES WITH YOUR CHILD IN A RESPECTFUL, NON-CONFRONTATIONAL MANNER?**

**Q. WHO DOES YOUR CHILD CONFIDE IN WHEN THEY HAVE CONCERNS?**

# < KNOW THE RISKS

There are many risks associated with underage drinking. Research shows that the younger people are when they start to drink, the more likely they will be to experience negative outcomes. Here are just a few to consider.

## HEALTH



Research shows a close link between alcohol misuse and an increased risk of developing **mental health** issues including emotional and behavioural problems.<sup>7</sup> Drinking from a young age can also increase the risk of a number of serious long-term **physical health** risks including liver disease, cancer and heart disease.<sup>8</sup> Binge drinking – six or more standard drinks in one sitting – can greatly increase these risks.

## BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



Throughout childhood, teenage years and right up to age 25, the brain is still developing.<sup>9</sup> If alcohol is introduced at this time it can have an impact on long-term **brain function** and create alcohol related problems later in life.<sup>10</sup>

## ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE



Alcohol damages areas of the brain responsible for concentration, memory, learning and attention.<sup>12</sup> Underage alcohol use can result in lower grades, **poor school attendance** and increases in dropout rates. Young people who drink frequently are more likely to report that their school work is poor and that they are disobedient in school.<sup>13</sup>

## SEXUAL HEALTH



Alcohol impairs young people's decision making skills and causes them to lose inhibitions, doing things that they may not do if they were sober. This can have serious implications for young people in terms of negotiating consent and protecting themselves from **infections and unwanted pregnancies**.<sup>14</sup>

## ILLEGAL DRUG USE



Regular alcohol misuse by young people can be linked to the use of **illegal drugs** such as cannabis.<sup>15</sup> Irish adolescents with serious drug and alcohol problems began to drink alcohol at a much earlier age than those without such problems.<sup>16</sup>

## VIOLENCE, ACCIDENTS & INJURIES



Alcohol affects young people's perception of danger and risk and impairs judgement and coordination. Young people who binge drink are at **high risk of incurring injuries** and being a victim or perpetrator of crime and violence.<sup>17</sup>

< **SEPARATE THE FACTS FROM THE MYTHS AT:**  
**DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS/PROACTIVE**

**PEOPLE WHO BEGIN DRINKING BEFORE AGE 15 ARE FOUR TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE THAN THOSE WHO START AT AGE 20 OR OLDER.**<sup>11</sup>

# < WHAT TO SAY AND WHEN?



There is no one size fits all message but tailoring your conversation to different ages helps. You may be unsure about how to answer your child's questions, but don't avoid the subject. A meaningful conversation about alcohol can positively influence your child's attitude towards alcohol in the future.

On the next page are suggested key messages that might help you start a conversation about alcohol with your child. However, you know your child best and you will know how much detail you need to go into. You can expand on the key messages in each age group opposite as your child gets older.

**JUST OVER 60% OF PARENTS (WITH CHILDREN BETWEEN 11 AND 15 YEARS) HAVE CLEAR AND DEFINITE RULES ON THEIR CHILDREN CONSUMING ALCOHOL BELOW THE AGE OF 18 YEARS.<sup>18</sup>**

< **SET RULES TOGETHER. MAKE A SMART AGREEMENT AT: [DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS/RULES](http://DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS/RULES)**

# < KEY MESSAGES



**AGE 10 - 12**

**EXPLAIN THAT**

Alcohol can affect brain development and your ability to concentrate, memorise and learn.

Drinking alcohol can cause you to behave out of character.

Your ability to participate in or perform well in sports and other hobbies is reduced.



**AGE 13 - 15**

**EXPLAIN THAT**

Alcohol comes in different strengths.

Alcohol can seriously impact your mental and physical health.

Drinking from an early age could lead to illegal drug use.

Drinking alcohol can affect how well you do in school.



**AGE 16 - 18**

**EXPLAIN THAT**

You should never ever drink and drive or get in a car with someone who has been drinking.

You might get in trouble with the Gardaí because drinking alcohol is against the law until you're 18.

Drinking alcohol can lead to unsafe sexual behaviour.

< **LEARN TOGETHER. TAKE OUR PARENT VS CHILD QUIZ AT: [DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS/TALK](http://DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS/TALK)**

# < ALLOWING YOUR CHILD TO DRINK ALCOHOL. WHAT'S THE HARM?

You may think that there is no real harm in your teenager having a few drinks, and that it's a rite of passage everyone goes through. This just isn't the case. There is growing evidence showing significant risks associated with early drinking that both teenagers and parents are not fully aware of.<sup>19</sup>

Some parents choose to allow their children to try a little alcohol at home under their supervision. The argument

is that if they are taught to drink sensibly under parental supervision, they will have a more mature attitude towards alcohol outside of the home. In Ireland, however, this has not proven to be the case.

**Children who were introduced to alcohol under supervision within the home are just as likely to binge drink outside of the home as those children who were not introduced to alcohol within the home.**<sup>20</sup>

**RESEARCH SHOWS THAT EARLY PARENTAL SUPPLY OF ALCOHOL IS ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED RISKS**<sup>21</sup>

## THE HSE DRUGS AND ALCOHOL HELPLINE

A free and confidential, active listening helpline and email support service offering non-directive support, information, guidance and referral to anyone with a question or concern related to substance use.

Freephone 1800 459 459 or email [helpline@hse.ie](mailto:helpline@hse.ie)

# < THE LAW

## IN IRELAND, IT IS ILLEGAL:

- < For anyone under the age of 18 to buy alcohol or pretend that they are over 18 in order to buy or drink alcohol;
- < To consume alcohol in a public space (for example, in a park or playground);
- < To give alcohol to anyone under the age of 18 unless in a domestic home and they have parental consent.



**THE LEGAL AGE FOR CONSUMING ALCOHOL IN IRELAND IS 18 YEARS OF AGE.**

**FOR FULL DETAILS OF THE LAW AND ALCOHOL, SEE [GARDA.IE](http://garda.ie)**

## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD COMES HOME DRUNK?

1	Stay calm.	6	If you feel it is necessary, seek medical help.
2	Ask if they have taken any other substance.	7	Wait until the following day to discuss their behaviour.
3	If their friends are also drunk, inform their parents.	8	Re-establish your rules about alcohol.
4	Help them to bed and make sure they are safe.	9	Remind your child that you are always there if they want to talk or share any problems.
5	Observe them closely in case they get sick.		

# ALCOHOL & YOU

GET THE FACTS YOU NEED TO MAKE  
INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT ALCOHOL

HALF PINT



This is one  
standard drink

100ML



This is one  
standard drink

35.5ML



This is one  
standard drink



Up to **11** standard  
drinks (110g alcohol)  
spread out over  
one week



Up to **17** standard  
drinks (170g alcohol)  
spread out over  
one week

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<sup>10</sup>National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) *Underage Drinking. A Major Public Health Concern*. Alcohol Alert No. 59. Rockville, MD: NIAAA, 2003.

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< VISIT [DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS](http://DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS)  
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND ALCOHOL

# DRINKAWARE

Web: [drinkaware.ie](http://drinkaware.ie) Email: [info@drinkaware.ie](mailto:info@drinkaware.ie)



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