

PARENTS, CHILDREN & ALCOHOL

ARE THEY HAVING THE
CONVERSATION?

A REPORT COMMISSIONED BY

DRINKAWARE

< RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH



Drinkaware's mission is to work with others to fundamentally and permanently change attitudes and behaviours so that drinking to excess and drinking underage become unacceptable. Drinkaware intends to achieve this by raising awareness, creating understanding and supporting behaviour change through evidence-led education and effective communications.

It has been well reported how early onset drinking is associated with a range of negative outcomes and

equally well documented is the positive influence that parents can exert over their teenager's possible drinking.^{1,2,3} Drinkaware recognises that parents are key 'gatekeepers' of adolescent behaviour and should be an integral part of any campaign aimed at reducing underage drinking.

Through its parents' campaign Drinkaware will focus on providing support for parents so that they can have informative, fact-based and timely discussions with their children about alcohol.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- < 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 record what further supports parents would benefit from in this area.
- < 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. The sample frame was designed based on Census data on the demographic characteristics of children between the age of 11 and 15, accessed via the Central Statistics Office.

This study was carried out by Behaviour & Attitudes, Ireland's largest independent market research company. This study was conducted via face to face in-home interviewing. In total 502 interviews with parents were conducted and all interviewing took place in August 2015.

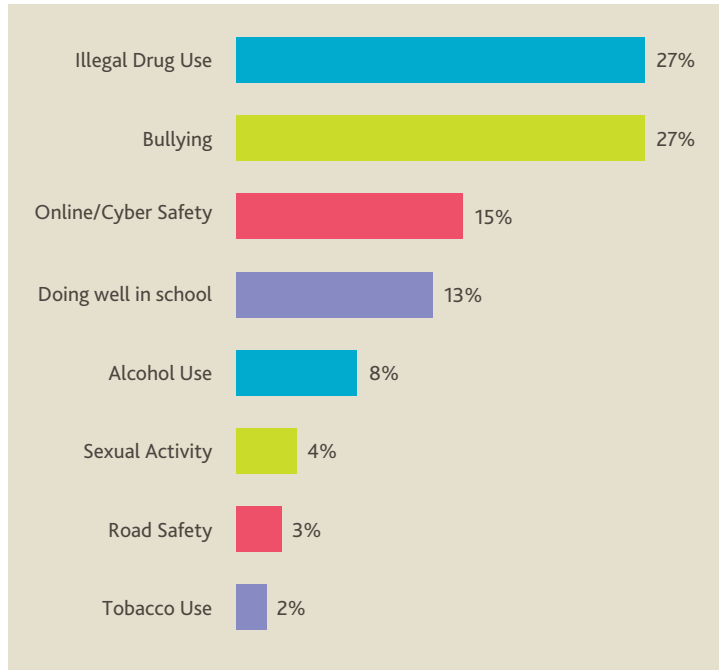
RESEARCH FINDINGS

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 drug use, bullying, cyber safety and school performance. This ranking of health and social concerns is consistent across demographics.

This suggests that concerns around alcohol are currently somewhat dormant for parents, especially when considered against the recent media focus on bullying and cyber safety.^{4,5,6}

Both national and international research indicates direct links between early alcohol use and both drug use and school performance.^{7,8} This finding shows that parents are not linking adolescent alcohol use with other high risk behaviours.



TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT ALCOHOL

80% of parents accept that they are the key source from whom children learn about alcohol.

4 out of 10 parents believe that this conversation should happen before the age of 12.

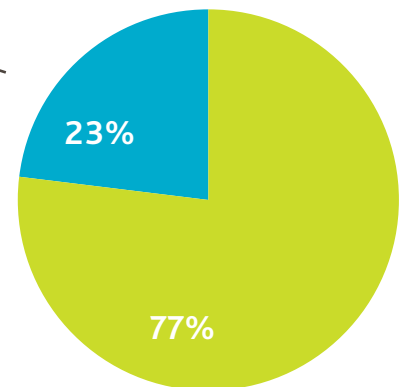
Mothers appear much more likely to have these conversations with children below the age of 14 years.

Parents were asked a series of questions about the key reasons for talking to their children about alcohol and from what age they felt it was important to have this conversation.

The high incidence of conversations reflects a general parental confidence that they can talk effectively to their children about alcohol. However, there are some issues which appear more likely to cause parents discomfort, including alcohol's relationship with mental health, risky sexual activity and other drug use.

23% of parents **HAVE NOT** spoken to their children about alcohol.

77% of parents **HAVE** spoken to their children about alcohol.



THERE IS LITTLE NATIONAL CONSENSUS AMONG PARENTS ON THE AGE AT WHICH TO HAVE THIS CONVERSATION AND WHAT INFORMATION IT SHOULD CONTAIN.

SOURCES OF ALCOHOL EDUCATION INFORMATION FOR PARENTS



JUST OVER 1 IN 10 PARENTS HAVE OBTAINED INFORMATION TO HELP THEM TALK TO THEIR CHILDREN ABOUT ALCOHOL.

It was important to Drinkaware to establish if parents were accessing information or resources to help them have the conversation with their children about alcohol and, if so, from where were they sourcing this information.

Despite parents' apparent confidence and comfort in talking to their children about alcohol, just over 1 in 10 parents has obtained information to help their conversations.

In addressing the areas of personal discomfort (mental health, risky sexual activity and other drug use), parents rarely actively seek information from other sources.

PARENTS WHO ACCESSED INFORMATION

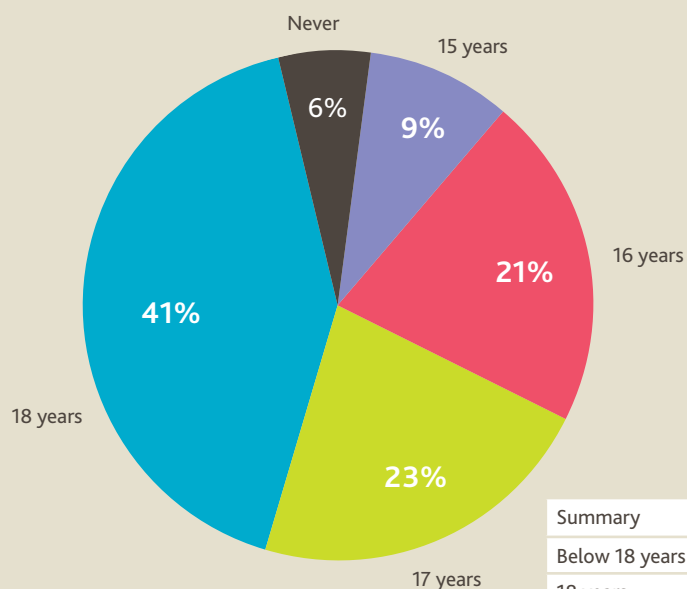
- Typically used two sources with an emphasis on personal contact with school, friends and family
- Were more likely to have clear and consistent rules about their children and alcohol than those who had not.

PARENTAL RULES ON CHILDREN & 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. Drinkaware sought a national picture regarding parental rules to establish if there is a consensus among parents around alcohol related rules at home.

It emerged that Irish parents are broadly permissive in relation to house rules on children consuming alcohol before 18 years, with 53% of parents stating that they believe it is acceptable for their children to drink alcohol before this age. The suggestion of a 'parental nation divided' is indicated by 41% of parents responding that their children are not allowed to drink alcohol under any circumstances before the age of 18 years.

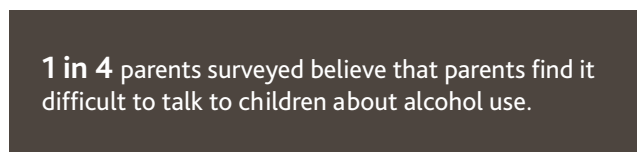
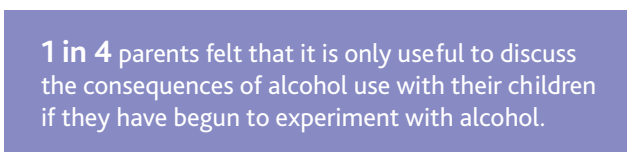
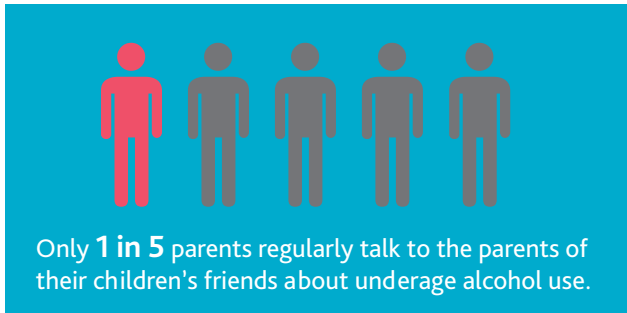
FROM WHAT AGE IS IT ACCEPTABLE FOR CHILDREN TO DRINK ALCOHOL AT HOME?



APPROXIMATELY 1 IN 3 PARENTS HAVE NO DEFINITE RULES OR A FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO THEIR CHILDREN CONSUMING ALCOHOL BEFORE THE AGE OF 18.

ATTITUDINAL STATEMENTS ON CHILDREN & ALCOHOL

Drinkaware sought to establish the general attitudes of parents towards children and alcohol in order to inform campaign content.



CONCLUSION

It is evident from the research, despite the apparent confidence among parents that there are many issues to address relating to parents talking to their children about alcohol. It is the intention of Drinkaware to build a public awareness campaign to run during 2016 drawing on the key findings from this research.

The focus of this campaign will be on supporting parents to 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.

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< KEY FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS FOR DRINKAWARE:

Parents are not seeking support to have this important conversation. There is little national consensus on the age at which to have this talk or what information it should contain.

Drinkaware aim to establish a strong need amongst parents for advice and support in communicating with their children on alcohol related topics. Drinkaware will provide guidance to parents through the development of age appropriate materials which will be clear, concise and based on best practice.

A significant proportion of parents believe having a conversation about alcohol with their children is difficult. A high level of parents also expressed discomfort in talking to their children about the relationship between alcohol and mental health, sexual health and drug use.

Drinkaware will develop resources to support parents to have this conversation with their children and aim to develop partnerships with influential organisations with supporting expertise in these key areas.

In terms of rules about underage drinking, Irish parents are a nation divided: half are precise and strict in relation to house rules for their children and alcohol; half are flexible and relatively permissive. **Drinkaware will communicate clearly the risks associated with underage drinking, and particularly underage binge drinking and drinking below the age of 15, so that parents can make informed decisions regarding their rules about underage alcohol use.**

The majority of parents accept that their own drinking influences the attitude their children have towards alcohol. **Drinkaware will continue its work in raising awareness of the effects of alcohol misuse and the importance of adhering to the low risk weekly drinking guidelines.**

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