

**YOUNG PEOPLE, ALCOHOL  
AND MENTAL HEALTH**  
SUPPORT FOR PARENTS



**DRINKAWARE**

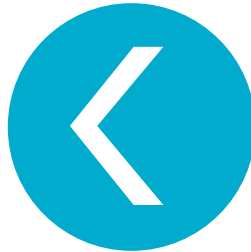
# DRINKAWARE

Drinkaware is an independent not-for-profit organisation with a vision of an Ireland where alcohol is not misused. Our mission is to work with others to 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:



**TACKLING  
UNDERAGE  
DRINKING**



**REDUCING  
ALCOHOL  
MISUSE**



**SUPPORTING  
ALCOHOL  
EDUCATION**

Drinkaware recognises that parents are the key gatekeepers of adolescent behaviour. Through its parents' campaign Drinkaware focuses on providing support for parents so that they can have informative, fact-based discussions with their children about alcohol. Research commissioned by Drinkaware<sup>1</sup> found that a significant proportion of parents were uncomfortable and ill-equipped to talk to their young people about the link between alcohol and mental health.

**BY AGE 13 YEARS, 1 IN 3 YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND ARE LIKELY TO HAVE EXPERIENCED SOME TYPE OF MENTAL DISORDER<sup>2</sup>**

# < ADOLESCENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing where the individual recognises their ability to cope with the normal daily stresses in life.<sup>3</sup>



**ALMOST 75% OF ALL MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES FIRST EMERGE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 15 AND 25<sup>4</sup>**

Adolescence describes the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood. It is a period of significant physical and psychological change. The impact of hormones on the adolescent body during this time can result in normal mood swings and changes to the temperament. Managing these changes can affect young people in many ways - relationships with family, friends, school and the wider community.

**DEPRESSION** affects how a person feels about themselves and about those around them. They may feel tired all the time and lose interest in hobbies, school and friendships. Often they just want to hide away from the world.<sup>5</sup>

**ANXIETY** is something we all experience from time to time. It can be a normal response to a stressful situation and sometimes it can be a positive thing, such as before an exam or an interview where it motivates us to do our best. However, when the anxious feelings persist for more than a couple of days and it affects other aspects of your life it can become a problem. The symptoms vary from person to person but anxiety can cause both mental and physical symptoms such as an inability to sleep or concentrate, nervousness, headaches and constant worry.<sup>6</sup>

## WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

Depression and anxiety can result from a number of things. For some it comes about because of a traumatic life experience such as bereavement, the breakdown of friendships or relationships or family difficulties such as financial concerns or bullying. In other situations, the person may have an innate tendency towards depression.<sup>7</sup>

As a parent it is important to be able to recognise the symptoms of depression and anxiety. If your young person experiences either of these conditions there are a number of approaches that can help. These are discussed on page 10 and 11.

# < THE IMPACT OF ALCOHOL ON MENTAL HEALTH

Adolescence can often be characterised by an increase in risk-taking and problematic behaviour, including the misuse of alcohol. Drinking from a young age increases the risk of experiencing a range of alcohol-related harms that can ultimately negatively affect mental health. These include:



EXPERIENCING INJURIES,  
CAUSING ACCIDENTS OR  
PERPETRATING VIOLENCE



POOR SCHOOL  
PERFORMANCE AND  
ATTENDANCE



DEVELOPING  
SERIOUS PHYSICAL  
HEALTH CONDITIONS

## ALCOHOL CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND MAKE EXISTING DIFFICULTIES WORSE

Alcohol impairs young people's decision-making skills and causes them to lose inhibitions. This can lead to engaging in behaviours that they may not ordinarily consider such as sexual experiences and illegal drug use.

Young people may drink to forget their problems or to cope with tough times or emotional pain they may be experiencing. While alcohol may appear to ease current emotional stress, it is however, a depressant and the reality is that alcohol can seriously affect mood and behaviour. Drinking to 'forget' or 'deal' with stress in life is not a healthy or helpful coping strategy and can cause further problems.<sup>8</sup>

**DEPRESSION IS A COMMON CONDITION THAT AFFECTS UP TO 10% OF TEENAGERS AT ANY ONE TIME<sup>9</sup>**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ALCOHOL AND YOUNG PEOPLE, SEE [DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS](https://www.drinkaware.ie/parents)



# < FACTS PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ALCOHOL AND MENTAL HEALTH

There is a strong association among young people between the amount that they drink and the severity of depression, anxiety and stress that they might suffer.<sup>10</sup>

Starting to drink at an early age is associated with alcohol dependence and related problems during adult life.<sup>11</sup>

Do you drink to ease stress? The example set by parents with their own drinking affects a child's attitudes and behaviours towards alcohol use.<sup>13</sup>

Alcohol is a depressant and can prove a trigger to low mood, especially in people prone to depression.<sup>12</sup>

Alcohol damages areas of the brain responsible for, concentration, memory, learning and attention.<sup>14</sup>

There is a link between frequent underage drinking and school dropout.<sup>15</sup>

Adolescents who drink frequently are more likely to exhibit behaviours that pose risk to themselves and others, such as driving after drinking, not wearing safety belts, having unprotected sex, suicide attempts or using illegal drugs.<sup>16</sup>

**SEPARATE  
THE FACTS FROM  
THE MYTHS AT  
[DRINKAWARE.IE/  
PARENTS/PROACTIVE](http://DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS/PROACTIVE)**

# < RECOGNISING DEPRESSION IN ADOLESCENCE

There are a number of symptoms associated with depression, outlined in the graphic below. As well as these symptoms, an overall 'disconnection' from life and those around them can be an indication that something is wrong.

## SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION:

Source: Aware

<b>F</b>	FEELING:	Sad, anxious, bored
<b>E</b>	ENERGY	Low energy, feeling tired and fatigued
<b>S</b>	SLEEP	Under or over sleeping, frequent wakening
<b>T</b>	THINKING	Slow thinking, poor concentration
<b>I</b>	INTEREST	Loss of interest in hobbies, food, family, etc.
<b>V</b>	VALUE	Low self-esteem
<b>A</b>	ACHES	Physical aches and pains associated with anxiety
<b>L</b>	LIFE	Loss of interest in life

**DISCONNECT** 



**IF SOMEONE IS EXPERIENCING FIVE OR MORE OF THESE SYMPTOMS FOR A PERIOD OF TWO OR MORE WEEKS, WITH LITTLE OR NO RESPITE, SEEK PROFESSIONAL ADVICE FROM A GP.<sup>17</sup>**

## It can be difficult for a parent to recognise what are 'normal' teenage moods and what is depression.

It is important to establish if the feelings the young person is experiencing make sense. For example, have they recently experienced a bereavement? This might explain why they are feeling sad or down. If however, everything seems to be going well in their life and there are no obvious areas for concern, feelings of sadness, withdrawal and loss of interest might indicate that something else is going on.

### ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

#### FREQUENCY:

How often is the person experiencing these symptoms?

#### INTENSITY:

How intense are the symptoms/feelings?

#### DURATION:

How long is it going on for?

## TWO OF THE BEST WAYS YOU CAN HELP YOUR YOUNG PERSON IS TO:



Reach out and let them know you are there



Get and accept support for YOURSELF

# STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO HELP YOU


**B**

## BELONGING

When young people have a sense of belonging they are less likely to get involved in risky behaviours. It's important that they feel connected and part of something. Let them know that they are cared for. Ask them what you can do to help them through a difficult time.

### ADVICE

**BE THERE TO LISTEN WHENEVER THEY WANT TO TALK.**

**R**

## RELAXATION

Relaxation is important for managing unhelpful thoughts and reducing anxiety, and can be helpful for both you as a parent and your young person. Encourage your young person to find what helpful actions they could take to relax (e.g. meditation, a walk, reading).

### ADVICE

**ALCOHOL SHOULD NEVER BE USED FOR RELAXATION AS IT CAN OFTEN INCREASE ANXIETY AND STRESS.**

**E**

## EXERCISE

Regular exercise and being active releases chemicals called endorphins. These endorphins trigger positive feelings in the body. This helps to lift a person's mood, reduce stress and anxiety and increases energy.

### ADVICE

**SUPPORT YOUR YOUNG PERSON TO FIND A FORM OF EXERCISE THAT THEY ENJOY.**

**A**

## ALCOHOL

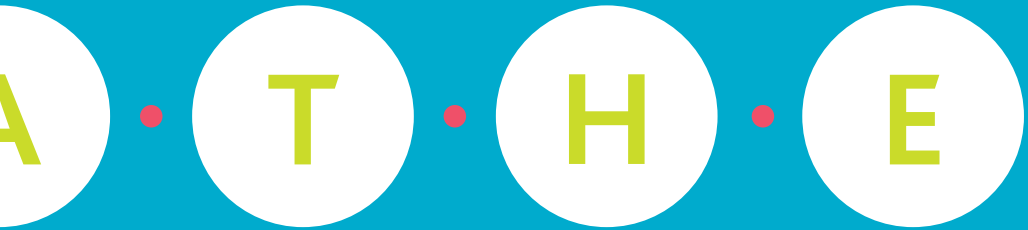
Alcohol is a depressant and can have a negative effect on mood and ability to cope with problems. If someone is struggling with depression, anxiety, or stress, avoid alcohol altogether. Talk to your young person about the risks that alcohol can have on their mental health.

### ADVICE

**DRINKING ALCOHOL CAN AVOID COPE WITH PROBLEMS. IT IS NOT A SOLUTION. CONFRO... THE ISSU...**



# OUR YOUNG PERSON



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## THOUGHTS

It is important to encourage your young person to notice whether their thoughts are helpful or unhelpful. Focussing on unhelpful negative thoughts can drain a person of energy and stop them from moving forward. More helpful, positive thoughts broaden a sense of possibility and opens up their mind to more options.

**ADVICE**  
ENCOURAGE  
POSITIVE  
THINKING AND  
POSITIVE SELF-  
TALK WITHIN  
YOUR HOME.

## HELP

Learn about depression or anxiety and become familiar with the signs and symptoms. If you are concerned about your young person, seek professional help from your GP. It is important that you do not self-diagnose your child.

**ADVICE**  
IT IS IMPORTANT  
TO GET A CORRECT  
DIAGNOSIS  
FROM A HEALTH  
PROFESSIONAL.

## EAT WELL

A balanced nutritious diet is just as important for mental health as it is for physical health. Junk food, fizzy drinks and foods high in sugar can give a short-term energy boost, but this may lead to a sharp drop in blood sugar later, leading to low mood and anxiety.<sup>18</sup> Encourage and facilitate healthy food choices.

**ADVICE**  
WHY NOT TRY  
COOKING A  
HEALTHY MEAL  
TOGETHER EVERY  
WEEK?

# TAKE NOTICE AND LOOK FOR SIGNS

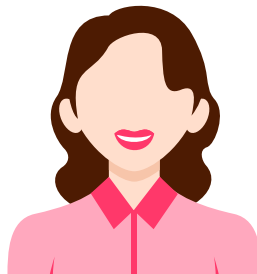
If your young person has already started to drink alcohol, there is a real possibility of them developing anxiety or depression. It is important that you take notice and look out for the signs.

Q. Are they spending more time out of the house or in the house than usual?

Q. Are they suddenly refusing to accept house rules?

Q. Has their mood or behaviour suddenly changed?

Q. Are they acting unusually secretive?



1

**PAY ATTENTION TO CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDE**

Q. Have their sleeping patterns changed?

Q. Have their eating habits changed?

Q. Are they spending more money lately?



2

## TAKE NOTE OF CHANGES IN EVERYDAY HABITS

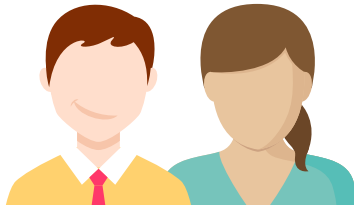
Q. How well do you know your children's friends?

Q. Are they spending increasing amounts of time with new friends?

Q. Do these parents know your rules about alcohol and do you know theirs?

Q. How well do you know their parents?

Q. Have you met these new friends?



3

## LOOK OUT FOR CHANGES IN FRIEND GROUPS

# < YOUNG PEOPLE AND RESILIENCE



Helping your young person build resilience can strengthen their ability to deal with the challenges they may face. Resilience is a protective factor which can prevent young people from engaging in risky behaviours, like misusing alcohol. Resilience can help enhance the mental health and wellbeing of a young person and help prevent such problems such as anxiety and depression.<sup>19</sup>

## HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT YOUR YOUNG PERSON TO BECOME MORE RESILIENT?

### BE CARING AND SUPPORTIVE

Encourage open dialogue and remind your children that they can share their problems with you or another trusted adult, without judgement.

### EXPECT GOOD THINGS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

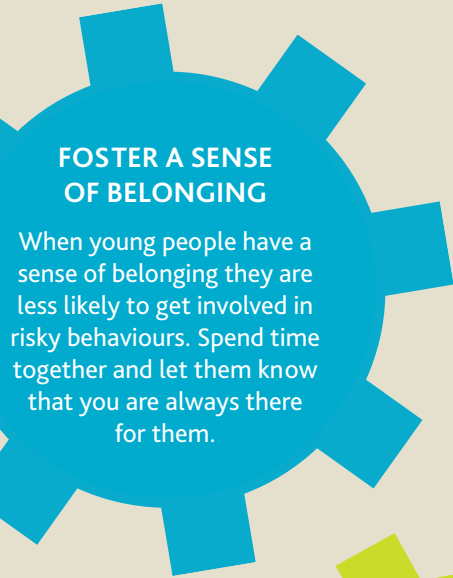
This can give them a sense of worth. Your expectations and your belief in your child's ability can motivate your child to fulfil his or her goals.

### SET CLEAR AND CONSISTENT LIMITS

Young people need a sense of right or wrong to encourage them to think about the decisions they make and the consequences of these decisions.



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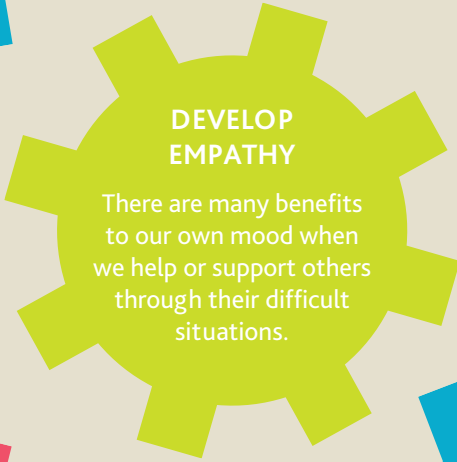
**FOSTER A SENSE OF BELONGING**

When young people have a sense of belonging they are less likely to get involved in risky behaviours. Spend time together and let them know that you are always there for them.



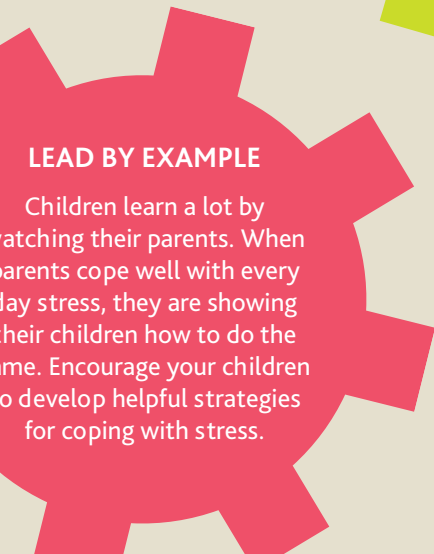
**BUILD LIFE SKILLS**

Help young people develop the skills they need in everyday life, such as assertiveness, problem-solving, decision-making and coping skills, by involving them in family decision-making and providing them with, age appropriate, responsibilities within the home.



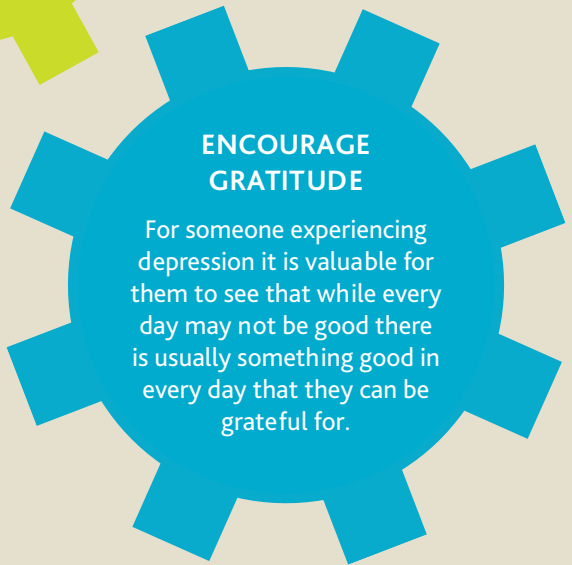
**DEVELOP EMPATHY**

There are many benefits to our own mood when we help or support others through their difficult situations.



**LEAD BY EXAMPLE**

Children learn a lot by watching their parents. When parents cope well with every day stress, they are showing their children how to do the same. Encourage your children to develop helpful strategies for coping with stress.



**ENCOURAGE GRATITUDE**

For someone experiencing depression it is valuable for them to see that while every day may not be good there is usually something good in every day that they can be grateful for.



# < WELLNESS TRACKER

Each of the habits below can have a positive and a negative impact on your mental health. Using the scale, what does your day looks like? See if you can allocate more time to the things that create a strong mental health.

- 1 None
- 2 Very little
- 3 Some
- 4 Quite a bit
- 5 A lot

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Hours of sleep							
Exercise							
Junk food							
Fizzy drinks							
Alcohol							
Screen time							
Time spent alone							
Time spent in company							
Today I am grateful for:							
The moods I experienced:							

## < FOR MORE INFORMATION ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND AVAILABLE SUPPORTS, VISIT



[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

[www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)

[www.jigsaw.ie](http://www.jigsaw.ie)

[www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)

[www.stpatricks.ie](http://www.stpatricks.ie)

## REFERENCES

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< VISIT **DRINKAWARE.IE/PARENTS**  
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND ALCOHOL

# DRINKAWARE

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