

Tips on how to prepare teenagers for situations where others may misuse alcohol

Over 80% of adolescents have used alcohol by the time they are 14 years of age.*

The **National Health and Medical Research Council** recommends that young people under the age of 15 do not drink any alcohol at all, and that until the age of 18 years the consumption of alcohol should be delayed as long as possible.

Many teenagers begin drinking by obtaining alcohol through what is known as *Secondary supply*, this is where an adult or parent provides alcohol in a private home. Almost 40% of under-age drinkers get alcohol from their parents in this way.

The dilemma for many parents is whether or not to allow teenagers to drink while supervised or to turn a blind eye to their experimentation with alcohol. It is important to prepare young people for the times when they will encounter alcohol during social settings, especially parties. Any drinking by adolescents under the age of 18 should be at low risk levels, in a safe environment, and supervised by an adult.

Tips for teaching teenage how to be responsible around alcohol

Give them strategies: Many teenagers will be facing situations where alcohol is available at parties. It is important to talk to young people about how to deal with situations that may arise when drinking gets out of hand. Make them aware of the dangers of drinking for the sake of getting drunk. Give them some strategies that will allow them to remove themselves from these situations without causing them embarrassment. Make sure they have an excuse ready if they feel uncomfortable and want to leave. Make it clear that you will come and get them no matter what the circumstances are or how late it is.

Peer Pressure: discuss the pressures they might feel from friends who are trying to encourage them to drink, also the pressures of drinking to impress someone they like at a party. Again suggest some 'reasons' they could give for not drinking so that other people are not offended and don't get angry that they are not 'joining in', for example they could say that they have already had a drink and that they are pacing themselves or that they are on medication and cannot drink.

Stay safe: talk about how to minimise the harms associated with drinking alcohol while they are out. Encourage them to stay with their friends, not to walk off alone and watch out for people who might try to spike their drinks. Tell them not to put their drinks down but keep hold of them until they have finished. Also make them aware of what a standard drink is and what the recommended safe limit is. It is better they drink slowly and eat during the course of the evening to help slow down the absorption of alcohol into the system.

Drink driving: talk to them about the dangers of getting into a car with someone who has been drinking, even if they are usually a good and trusted friend. Tell them to NEVER get into a car of someone who has been drinking and to NEVER drive themselves. Make a plan in case this situation arises, for example agree to pay for their taxi home or agree that if they phone you will pick them up straight away.

Speak to the host: ring the host before the party begins to make sure there will be adequate adult supervision. Find out if they will be supplying alcohol and if everyone is legally allowed to drink. Do not supply alcohol for your young person if there will be people under 18 years old at the party.

Positive feedback: make sure that you give the young person positive feedback when they abide by the agreed rules. If they ring to be picked up from a party where the misuse of alcohol is occurring make sure you let them know you are proud of them and glad they called you – not matter how late it is! Positive feedback increases the chances they will continue to follow the rules later.

**White V, Hayman J. "Australian Secondary Students' Use of Alcohol in 2005". Melbourne (AUST): Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, Cancer Control Research Institute; 2006.
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