

# Teenage drinking:

## Parents' communication style can make a difference

This fact sheet discusses differences in communication styles and provides tips and conversation starters...

### Did you know?

- › Research shows that how parents communicate with their teenagers can influence their attitudes and behaviours in relation to alcohol.

### Key facts

- › Even though young people may get information about alcohol and other drugs through television and school drug education, many prefer their parents to be their main source of information.
- › Young people whose parents disapprove of teenage drinking tend to delay when they have their first drink of alcohol or drink less or less often.

### Special considerations and tips

- › **Support and encourage positive behaviour.** Try to avoid focusing on the negatives. Keep in mind that communication is a two-way process that involves listening. Find ways to signal to your teenager that you are interested and willing to listen to his/her ideas—here are some conversation starters:  
'How do you feel about...?'  
'Did you see [name of television show] the other night?'  
'What do you think about how they handled...?'
- › **Choose an appropriate time to talk.** Avoid distractions such as the telephone or television. Some teenagers may not like being approached directly by their parents on matters related to alcohol. You could soften the approach by starting a conversation while doing the washing up or driving somewhere. Watching a television show together can indicate to your teenager that you are taking an interest in him/her, and can provide a great conversation starter.
- › **Try to engage your teenager in an open and honest conversation.** Try to make the conversation one that involves him/her being able to express feelings, thoughts and opinions without fearing the consequences or feeling like it is an interrogation. However, don't always expect total honesty; it is more important to be having the conversation in the first place. Try to have an equal conversation, but be clear about where your boundaries are—after all, you are your teenager's parent, not his/her friend.

- › **Discuss limits and boundaries.** You could start this discussion by chatting about each other's expectations. Asking your teenager 'What do you think is acceptable?' or 'What would you like to do?' can give a starting point for negotiation (if appropriate). It can help your teenager feel that you are taking him/her seriously, and he/she is likely to 'own' the boundaries you set together.
- › **Help your teenager deal with peer pressure.** Adolescence is a time of enormous change for young people, and this can leave your teenager feeling quite vulnerable. Your support can help him/her develop confidence to deal with things like peer pressure. Where possible, help your teenager feel comfortable with the idea that it is okay not to drink, or to say 'no'. A good way to begin might be to role-play some typical scenarios and then give your teenager examples of what he/she could say or do:

#### *What to say*

'No, thanks. I'm not into alcohol/It's not my thing.'  
'I don't feel like it at the moment.'  
'I'd rather have a soft drink.'

#### *What to do*

'Lose' unwanted drinks that are given to you. Put it down and walk away after a while (but be wary of leaving a drink unattended as drink spiking may be an issue).  
Try to stay away from people who give you a hard time about not drinking.  
Hang out with other friends who aren't into drinking.

### Further considerations

There are a number of questions that you can ask your teenager about a party they are invited to attend:

- › Who is holding the party?
- › Where/when is the party being held?
- › Will alcohol be available/is alcohol allowed?
- › Will the party be supervised? By who? (parents, older siblings etc).
- › What time does the party start and finish?
- › Do you/your friends need to be dropped off and picked up later?
- › Is there an invitation?





The scenario below relates to a young man who is attending a party. There are examples of a potential 'before' the party situation and an 'after' the party situation. Three examples of how a parent might react to each situation are provided followed by things to consider depending on how you choose to communicate with your teenager.

### SCENARIO 1:

Joey is 15 and wants to take alcohol to his friend's party.

Mum and Dad, can I take a few beers to Cam's party?  
Everyone's bringing something.

Parent 1

Sure, mate. Do you want us to buy it for you?

#### Things to consider

- It might be helpful to contact the host's parents to find out more about the party, including whether alcohol will be allowed.
- Other helpful things to know are whether the party is by invitation only (what are the chances of 'gatecrashers'?) and if there is a plan for emergencies (such as someone passing out).

Parent 2

Absolutely not! You are not to take or drink any alcohol while you are at the party. We have discussed this before and we cannot allow you to drink. If you want to go to the party then we can discuss this, but you will not be allowed to drink. We trust you and believe you will make the right choice, otherwise you cannot go.

#### Things to consider

- Does Joey feel that his parents have listened to his point of view?
- Does Joey understand why you do not want him to drink, or to take alcohol to the party?

Parent 3

Well, we have talked about possibly allowing you to have some low-alcohol beer when there is a party, but we don't know Cam's parents. It may not be acceptable to them to have alcohol at the party, or they may not want people bringing their own alcohol. We will have to give Cam's parents a call before we decide on this one.

#### Things to consider

- In this conversation, Joey's parents are remaining open-minded, taking time to make a decision and are aware that other families have different rules about teenagers and alcohol.
- Joey's parents are modelling behaviour that is respectful of others' values and rules.
- If Joey's parents allow him to have beer they need to be aware that even though he may only take two beers to the party, Joey may in fact consume more alcohol. It would be advisable to discuss this with him beforehand.





## SCENARIO 2:

Joey came home drunk last night. It's 12 noon and he has just woken up.

### Morning Mum and Dad....

Parent 1

Oh, you poor thing! Did you have a big night? Looks like you have a massive hangover—let's get you something to eat.

#### Things to consider

- When Joey has recovered, it may be helpful to discuss the effects and harms associated with teenage heavy drinking, including alcohol withdrawal (hangover).
- You could explain standard drinks and low-risk drinking guidelines, so that next time Joey is better able to control how much he drinks.

Parent 2

Look at you! We are disgusted with your behaviour and you are grounded for a month.

#### Things to consider

- It may be helpful to wait until Joey has recovered before you initiate a discussion about his drinking.
- If Joey drank excessively last night the effects of alcohol can last for up to 24 hours. He should take care not to participate in risky sports (such as racing or diving) or to operate machinery, and he should keep up his fluids (water and orange juice are best).

Parent 3

Hello Joey. It's obvious you drank last night. You need to be drinking lots of water today and we need to talk about what happened last night because we are worried about you and disappointed that you may have broken a rule we agreed on together — we are happy to sit down with you after lunch.

#### Things to consider

- In this conversation, Joey's parents are adopting a neutral tone on what happened the night before but they are making him aware that they are disappointed and a discussion will need to be had.
- Joey's parents may be disappointed but their first concern is to ensure that he is safe and that he recovers from the alcohol withdrawal.
- When they do discuss what happened, Joey's parents could express their disappointment that he has broken the rules they agreed on, and it would be helpful to listen to what he has to say. If this is the first time it has happened, Joey's parents could use it as an opportunity to avoid it happening again in the future.

## Further information/Where to get help

- › For information on the effects of alcohol and other drugs, go to [www.druginfo.adf.org.au](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au).
- › **Fact sheet 1: Alcohol and adolescent development** provides information about some of the harms associated with teenage drinking.
- › **Fact sheet 3: Standard drinks and low-risk drinking** provides useful guidelines.
- › **Fact sheet 6: Which parental factors influence young people's choices about alcohol?** provides useful tips on how parents can influence their teenager's decisions about alcohol.
- › For additional copies of this fact sheet see [http://www.olgc.sa.gov.au/default.asp?page=general.Youth\\_Issues.htm&menu=general](http://www.olgc.sa.gov.au/default.asp?page=general.Youth_Issues.htm&menu=general) or <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/drugstrategy> >resources or parent support

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