



An Australian Government Initiative



Alcohol and your child:

Helpful information for parents, families and the community

The following information is provided for parents, caregivers, family and community members.

Alcohol is the most widely used recreational drug in Australia. Many adults drink to relax, celebrate, 'escape from reality' and enjoy themselves.

Most young people will use alcohol sensibly and safely, and only a small proportion who experiment with alcohol will go on to experience problems with its use. However, parents, caregivers, families and the wider community may have concerns about the potential problems or harms surrounding young people and alcohol.

Some of these concerns are discussed below.

How much influence can you, your family and your community have on your child's use of alcohol?

You can play a big role in teaching your children about alcohol. Studies show that parents and families are strong influences in how young people use alcohol.⁽¹⁾

You can also have a significant influence on what young people think about alcohol. This is often a surprise to some parents.

Many parents believe that they don't have much influence at all on their children when it comes to alcohol and other drugs. We now know that parents *can* have a significant part to play in young people's knowledge about safe alcohol use.

Video

The *Rethinking Drinking* video includes a segment called '*Family matters ... a few thoughts*', which features several parents from different walks of life talking about children, families and alcohol.





Alcohol and your child

How do young people obtain alcohol?

Studies in Australia and overseas consistently show that parents are the most common source of alcohol for young people. Friends and older siblings are less common sources of alcohol.⁽²⁾

Where do young people drink alcohol?

The two most common places for students to drink alcohol are in the family home or at a friend's home.⁽²⁾ A recent survey showed that on their last drinking occasion nearly two out of three teenagers drank alcohol under adult supervision.

What can you, your family and community do to help keep your child safe around alcohol?

Harm minimisation is an approach that aims to **prevent, minimise or reduce** the harmful or negative effects of drinking. This applies to:

- the person who drinks alcohol
- his or her friends and family
- the community.

There are some practical ways that you can minimise harm associated with alcohol use:

- 1 helping your child to be strong and resilient when it comes to making choices
- 2 promoting positive role models (or being one)
- 3 thinking about ways to minimise harm and maximise safe use
- 4 seeking support through parent and community networks
- 5 taking an interest in school activities
- 6 encouraging your child to stay in school or training.

1. Helping your child to be strong and resilient

Young people who are strong and resilient are less likely to become involved in long term substance abuse.⁽³⁾

What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to rebound or bounce back from stressful experiences.⁽³⁾ Being resilient is about being able to cope with life experiences. Parents, caregivers, families, friends and communities can help young people to develop and strengthen their personal resilience.

Protective and risk factors

The terms 'protective factors' and 'risk factors' are often used when talking about resilience.

- **Protective** factors are those things that help people to be strong and resilient.
- **Risk** factors are the opposite of protective factors. Risk factors decrease the chances of becoming strong and resilient.

Some protective factors for young people⁽³⁾

- Feeling loved.
- Feeling respected.
- Feeling a sense of belonging (or connectedness) to a family.
- Feeling a sense of belonging (or connectedness) to a community.
- Having opportunities for contributing to a family or community.
- Having a good relationship with an adult outside the family (such as a teacher or coach).



- Easy access to drugs.
- Poverty.
- Feeling of detachment from school or community.
- Other family members' experiences with drug problems.
- Having friends or peers who use drugs.
- Feeling/being isolated or alienated.
- Poor health status or socio-economic status.
- Social or cultural discrimination.

You and all who come into close contact with your child can consciously do things that encourage or promote the above protective factors. Minimising the identified risk factors as much as possible also helps.



2. Promoting positive role models (or being one)

Good role models can be motivating and influential for everyone. This is particularly so for young people. Sporting, academic, community and entertainment role models are often used as inspirational models for young people.

Peer role models can be even more influential than national celebrities. Peer role models are more accessible and 'reachable' to young people.

Examples of peer role models

- An older student at school, university or TAFE.
- An admired cousin or other family member.
- A young person in the local community who has done well in a particular field.
- A local community leader.

Parents, caregivers and family members can also be positive role models for their children. One of the best ways to do this is to model safe alcohol use themselves.

- If you drink, remember that you're a role model.
- If you don't drink, talk about why you don't.
- If you look after your health or safety, talk about how.

3. Thinking about ways to minimise harm

As a parent, family or community member you can help to increase the safe use of alcohol.

- Talk to your children about what is important to them.
- Know who your children's friends are.
- Start discussions about alcohol and drugs at an early age.
- Talk to your children about the effects of excessive alcohol use.
- Discuss with your children ways to avoid these negative consequences.
- Know where your children are. It's OK to insist on this as a safety issue.
- Work towards developing and maintaining a good relationship with your child; it will help if issues concerning alcohol do arise.
- Talk about ways of getting home safely from parties and other places where alcohol may be used. Do this before your child leaves for the occasion.

Some ideas that can help

- Give your child a phone card or mobile phone to ring for a taxi or an adult to collect them.
- Provide enough money to order or share a taxi.
- Plan for your child to stay overnight at a friend's place.
- You might come up with other plans that are acceptable to both you and your child.

Remember: Harm minimisation is as much about preventing anticipated harm as reducing actual harm.



4. Seeking support through parent and community networks

Talking with other parents can provide support and information (if and when needed).

- If you are planning a teenage party, talk to other parents who have held one. Their experiences can help a lot.
- Encourage car pooling of children to parties and other events. This not only shares the workload but is supportive of other parents and families. It also helps you to keep in contact with the people your child is mixing with.
- Become aware of opportunities for other respected adults to play a role in your child's life. Youth leaders, sports coaches and other adults can contribute to a child's feeling of connectedness to people and their community. A feeling of connectedness has been identified as a protective factor against drug abuse.
- Contact local community agencies and services for information (refer to the list on page 5 as a starting point). Most will have free pamphlets or lists of websites that can be useful. Community agencies will often be able to offer counselling if it is required or refer you to a relevant community agency.

Remember to take opportunities to talk informally with other parents when you meet them at school functions, sporting venues, other community events, and even shopping centres.

5. Taking an interest in school activities

Schools are set up to be a part of the community and as such they are there for families and parents as well as students. Schools welcome parent and community interest and involvement and this in turn has a positive effect on students' attitudes.

By taking an interest in school activities you are doing something positive for your children.

Some of the more formal school committees include:

- school councils
- ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness) committees
- sub-committees for sport and other school events.

While it is not always possible to join some of these, there are many informal ways of becoming involved in what happens at your child's school. These include:

- attend parent-teacher interview nights and other scheduled events
- keep in touch through school newsletters, email and other forms of communication
- help with school sporting, social and cultural activities.

6. Encouraging your child to stay in school or training

Staying at school or being involved in training can be a protective factor for alcohol or other drug use for young people. Assisting your child to stay in school or training is a positive way to minimise any problems with alcohol-related harm.

By taking an interest in and talking to your children about alcohol use you are becoming an influential partner in the delivery of the *Rethinking Drinking* program.



Support networks

The list of support networks below can be used as a starting point for contacting local agencies in your community. The agencies can advise you about support group networks, programs and resources available in your local area.

National

Family Drug Support

Staffed by trained volunteers
1300 368 186

Australian Capital Territory

Alcohol and Drug Program

Counselling, information and referral
(02) 6205 4545

New South Wales

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Counselling, information and referral
(02) 9361 8000 (metro)
1800 422 599 (regional)

Northern Territory

Amity Community Services

Counselling, information and referral
(08) 8981 8030 (metro)
1800 629 683 (regional)

Alcohol and Other Drugs Program

Department of Health and Community Services
Counselling, information and training
(08) 8922 8399

Queensland

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Counselling, information and referral
(07) 3236 2414 (metro)
1800 177 833 (regional)

South Australia

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Counselling, information and referral
1300 131 340

Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council (ADAC)

Information, education and support services for Aboriginal people and communities
(08) 8362 0395

Drug and Alcohol Services Council (DASC)

Counselling, assessment, information, support services, education and training
(08) 8274 3333

Parent Helpline

1300 364 100

Tasmania

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Counselling, information and referral
1800 811 994

Victoria

DRUG info

Information (including print resources and other assistance)
1300 858 584
www.druginfo.adf.org.au

Directline

Counselling and referral
(03) 9416 1818 (metro)
1800 136 385 (regional)

Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS)

Counselling, support and referral for 12-21 year olds
(03) 9418 1020 (metro)
1800 014 446 (regional)

Family Drug Help

Staffed by trained volunteers and professional counsellors
1300 660 068

Western Australia

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Counselling, information and referral
(08) 9442 5000 (metro)
1800 198 024 (regional)

Parent Drug Information Service (PDIS)

Counselling, information, referral and support for parents
(08) 9442 5050 (metro)
1800 653 203 (regional)

References

- (1) Shanahan, P. and Hewitt, N. (1999) *Developmental research for a National Alcohol Campaign: Summary report*, Department of Health and Aged Care, ACT.
- (2) *Australian secondary students' use of alcohol in 1999* (2001) Monograph series no. 45, Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, ACT.
- (3) Fuller, A., McGraw, K. and Goodyear, M. (1998) *The mind of youth: Resilience – A Connect Project* (1998) Turning the Tide project, Victoria.
- (4) *Structural determinants of youth drug use* (2001) Australian National Council on Drugs, ACT.



Other sources of information

Free booklets/pamphlets

Most State and Territory government health and education departments produce resources about alcohol and young people. The following national materials are also highly recommended.

- ***Dealing with alcohol use: a guide for parents.*** Victoria, Australian Drug Foundation (2000).
www.adf.org.au
(Toll-free: 1800 069 700)
- ***Hosting teenage parties: managing alcohol and other drugs.*** Victoria, Australian Drug Foundation (2000).
www.adf.org.au
(Toll-free: 1800 069 700)
- ***Our strongest defence against the drug problem.*** Canberra, Commonwealth Government.
www.drugs.health.gov.au
(Toll-free: 1800 250 015)
- ***Teenagers and alcohol: a parent's guide.*** Canberra, National Alcohol Campaign.
www.nationalalcoholcampaign.health.gov.au

Websites

- REDI – Resilience Education and Drug Information www.redi.gov.au
- MindMatters and CommunityMatters (mental health resources)
www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters
- Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program
www.dest.gov.au/schools/indigenous/ieda.htm
- Australian Department of Health and Ageing
www.health.gov.au
(Includes information on State and Territory laws and regulations about underage drinking.)

