

Drinking Alcohol and Raising Children a few things to consider

Children and young people look to their parents for a model of what is “normal” or reasonable behaviour. If they grow up seeing their parents binge drinking or misusing drugs they are far more likely to adopt this pattern too – and adopt it early.

If they see that their parents use alcohol in a way that isn't problematic, they don't drink and drive and they take a balanced approach to most things in life – chances are the kids will too.

International and Australian research (outlined succinctly on Australian Drug Foundation (ADF) website) shows that parents who drink too much have a huge impact on children's lives. The bottom line is - Parents should minimise their drinking of alcohol in an effort to parent better and set a good example for children.

An acknowledged safe or reasonable level of drinking in Australia is: Men - no more than 4 standard drinks per day; Women - no more than 2 standard drinks per day – and everyone should have at least 2 alcohol free days each week.

The basic message is: Always drink alcohol in a responsible, safe way which shows you value your health and relationships above all else.

For those parents who choose not to minimise their alcohol use, the following suggestions can minimise the harm for children:

- Watch what you say - do not talk about alcohol in a way that glorifies it “I can't wait to get stuck into the red at that party!”, “Oh it was so funny when she fell over after 5 glasses of champers” etc. – children are sponges and they pick up the values underlying these conversations
- If a friend says something like this, reframe it in front of the children e.g., “I bet they were so embarrassed the next morning”
- Never be seen to use alcohol as a panacea for stress or problems – e.g., “God I am desperate for a beer after THAT conversation”
- Consider delaying your drinking until the kids are asleep sometimes - this will minimise your intake and be a better use of your time with them
- If you knowingly go out for a big night (such as a wedding) agree that one partner will get up and take the kids out to the park, etc while the other sleeps in. Later the other person can have a nap in the afternoon while the other parent takes over- it is harmful to poison yourself with alcohol and be useless to the kids the next day
- At times make an effort to drink light beer or wine and soda and alternate with soft drinks – pointing out that you are doing this while kids are listening is a good way to model harm minimisation. You might say “I'm only having one drink tonight as I need to be fresh for work tomorrow”

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- Never ask your kids to get you a drink from the fridge or to fill your glass: don't involve them in your alcohol use at all - keep it low key
- Do not argue over who will drive home before or during a social function – kids take this to mean you cannot enjoy yourself without alcohol. Sharing the “designated driver” role also teaches kids that each of you can enjoy a night out without alcohol. Kids work things out pretty quickly and can detect messages about parental attitudes towards alcohol (i.e., “Dad never drives ‘cause he always like to have lots of beers and be the life of the party when we’re out”)
- Do not purchase alcohol as a gift for people associated with your children such as teachers or a sports coach
- Showing your disapproval of underage drinking is associated with better outcomes for young people. This also involves modelling positive ways to focus your time and energy in your life and keeping a strong relationship going so that your child can talk to you if they have problems. Do not allow your children to taste or try an alcoholic drink. The research shows that the traditional idea about enjoying a wine at home with the family is not an effective way to teach sensible drinking habits. Help them feel involved in celebrations while drinking non-alcoholic drinks (i.e. provide apple juice if they want to be involved in a celebration or toast)
- For adolescents the vital message from the research is that alcohol use needs to be delayed as long as possible to reduce the chance of long term problems. By showing clear expectations that they will not drink you can stop them from learning to use alcohol as a social crutch while they are developing their identities. When they do begin drinking, learn more about harm minimisation strategies using the ADF website to manage alcohol use in teens
- If your friends come over, don't leave bottles and cans for kids to wake up to, collect these as night goes on or do a quick clean up before bed so they do not wake up to that kind of scene
- Model safe driving by saying “no thanks I have to drive later” when offered an alcoholic drink in front of your kids; they can then see that there are set boundaries

This isn't meant to be a guilt trip, we are spreading the word about what the research clearly shows and what we see in the young people and their parents who access our centre.

If you make an effort to try some or all of these tips the chances of your kids growing up healthy and happy are increased. They will still probably experiment but they are less likely to binge drink at dangerous levels and develop problems that continue into their twenties and beyond.

If you feel alcohol is a problem for you call Directline on **1800 888 236** for more information.