



# A PARENTS' GUIDE TO TEEN ALCOHOL AND PARTIES

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# EVERYONE LOVES PARTIES

For young people, parties are an important part of growing up. But teenage fun can quickly turn ugly when alcohol is on the scene.

Every week in Australia, one teenager between the ages of 14 and 17 dies as a result of alcohol abuse. Scores more are hospitalised.

**This guide presents the practical steps you can take to minimise the risk for your teenager.**

# MODEL GOOD BEHAVIOUR

As a parent, you play a vital role in influencing your teenager's use of alcohol. You carry the primary responsibility in discouraging early and excessive use.

**The single most important thing that you can do is to model safe drinking behaviour.**

The example you set in where, how and why you use alcohol will have the strongest impact on your teenager's attitude toward drinking. Be a positive influence. Let them observe you modelling sensible drinking habits.

- Rates of drinking at harmful levels among 12-17 year olds have doubled in the past two decades.
- Two in four Australian 16-17 year olds drink at low-risk levels and one in four regularly binge drink.
- Almost one in two 18-19 year olds frequently drink at risky levels.
- One in two Australian teenagers who get drunk will do something they regret.

**"Teenagers who drank with their parents were about one-third as likely to binge drink.**

It appears that parents who model responsible drinking behaviours have the potential to teach their children the same... Once something is not taboo in a household it reduces the likelihood that it will be abused."

— Journal of Adolescent Health, 2004

# NEGATIVE EFFECTS

The brain is in a state of intense development from the early teens until the early 20s, forming all the critical pathways for learning, memory, planning, emotional stability and thinking.

**Alcohol disrupts brain development.**

Teenagers who drink risk their brains not reaching full capacity. Teenagers under 15 should avoid alcohol because at this age no studies have been able to identify a safe level of alcohol consumption.

The earlier a young person begins drinking, the greater the risk of alcohol-related problems later in life. A person who begins drinking before the age of 15 is four times as likely to develop alcohol dependence as one who waits until they are 21.



Open up the communication channels with your teenager.

Listen to what they have to say about alcohol. Hear their opinions, questions, feelings and concerns. Find out what the issues are for them. Take an interest in where they're going and what they're doing.

Ask them what they understand the dangers to be, and have them propose their own strategies for avoiding the risks. This is a good way to open up the discussion gently.

# COMMUNICATE

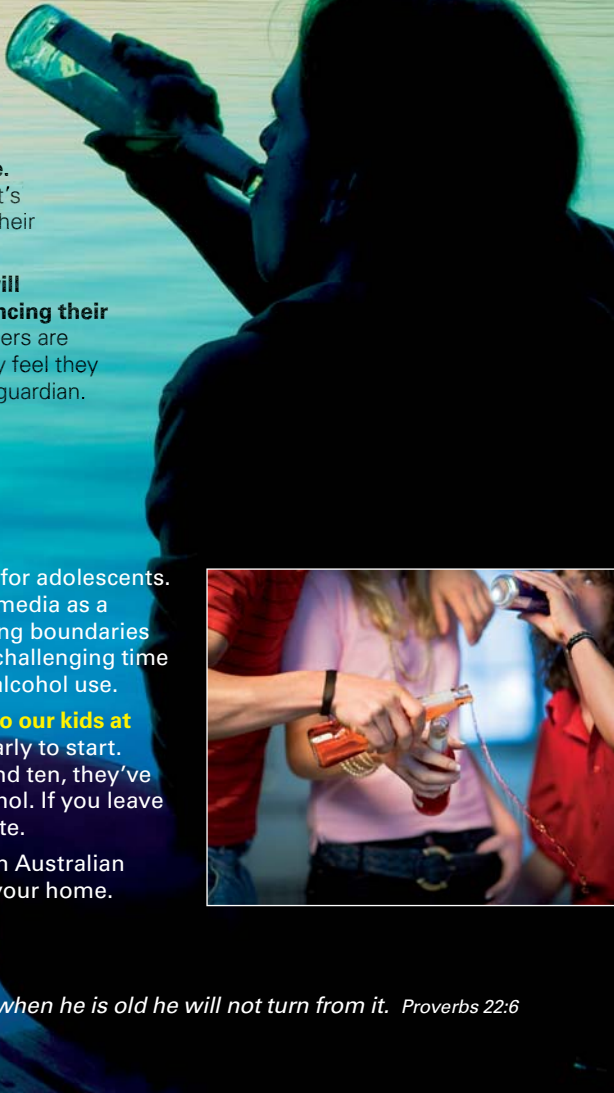
It is a sad and disturbing reality that more 12-17 year old Australians obtain alcohol from a relative than any other source.

**Listen first, then speak.** Share your thoughts on alcohol and gently explain your feelings and concerns. It is important that you let him or her know you do not approve of under-age alcohol use because it is dangerous. Be firm, but non-judgemental. Back up what you're saying by explaining the negative effects of alcohol during these important years.

**Be actively involved in your teenager's life.**

Get to know their friends. Keep up with what's going on for them. You can be interested in their life and still respect their privacy.

**A good relationship with your teenager will determine how effective you are in influencing their use of alcohol.** Research shows that teenagers are much more likely to delay drinking when they feel they have a close, supportive tie with a parent or guardian.



## START YOUNG

Friends and "fitting in" are high priorities for adolescents. They tend to look to their friends and the media as a model for how to behave, often questioning boundaries laid down by their parents. This can be a challenging time to establish appropriate limits regarding alcohol use.

**Experts agree that we should be talking to our kids at early primary school age.** It's never too early to start.

By the time children are between eight and ten, they've already formed fairly clear views on alcohol. If you leave it until they're fourteen, it might be too late.

Discussions about alcohol are common in Australian households. Keep the dialogue going in your home.



*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Proverbs 22:6*



## HOW TO HOST A SAFE PARTY

Helping your teenager plan a party can be an enjoyable experience for you both. Create a night that your guests will remember for all the right reasons. No one wants drunken behaviour, property damage, personal injury or gatecrashers. Here are some tips for hosting a safe party.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Explain to your teenager that as the parent you are legally responsible for the safety and well being of young people in your home. You have a duty of care, and there may be legal consequences if this is breached.

## AVOID GATE CRASHERS

Gatecrashers are becoming more common at teenage parties. Here are some ways you can avoid them:

- Issue personal invitations in writing only, **never via sms text messages, Facebook, blogs or email**, which might be forwarded and distributed without your permission or knowledge. Avoid open-house parties.
- Obtain RSVPs, compile a list of attendees and allow entrance by invitation only. **No invite, no entry!**
- Provide only one entry and exit point and supervise access to your home.
- Refuse uninvited guests or those bringing alcohol. It's your party and you have the right to ask people to leave. Phone the local police station if things start to get out of hand, or 000 if the station is unattended.

## MAINTAIN A PRESENCE

Supervision of teenager parties by responsible adults is essential. At least one parent must be present for the duration of the function.

Ask another couple, a parent or friend for support. For large parties, arrange a number of adults to be present.

Frequently bring in snacks and non-alcoholic beverages. Your visibility will help keep the party running smoothly, and with arm loads of goodies, they'll be pleased to see you!

As a host, you have the right to set the standard of acceptable behaviour and ensure that it is maintained at your party.

## NUMBERS AND TIMING

Keep numbers manageable (10-15 teenagers per adult).

State the precise start and finish times on the invitation.

## COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS

Communicate with the parents of the teenagers invited.

Talk to other parents about their experiences with teenage parties. They often feel the same as you.

If informing parents is difficult, try sending the invitations to the parents, get your teenager to organise the parents to contact you, or write separate parent letters to inform them.



Discuss the ground rules with your teenager before the party is announced, to ensure that everyone has a safe and enjoyable time. This gives you both an opportunity to express feelings and concerns, allows you to outline your expectations and helps him or her to understand your philosophy of non-alcohol parties.

Be prepared to negotiate if your teenager reacts negatively to your proposal. For instance, restrict your presence in the party area in exchange for your teenagers' agreement to have an alcohol-free party, or allow up to 30 guests if your teenager agrees to make up formal written invitations.

## NEGOTIATE GROUND RULES

## ALCOHOL

Australian teenagers are likely to drink at high risk levels when at a friend's house or at a party, even while supervised. For this reason, **it is strongly recommended that alcohol not be served to people under the age of eighteen.**

State on the invitation that no alcohol is permitted.

Laws differ between states but generally it is not an offence for an under-18-year-old to consume alcohol in a private home. However, in some states you are committing an offence if you supply alcohol for a minor without authorisation from their parents. Check your local and state laws.

If you serve alcohol to underage drinkers and an accident occurs, you may be found criminally and/or civilly liable in a court of law.

If you discover them drinking, be prepared to tackle this. Ask to mind the alcohol while they are in your home. You have a right to confiscate alcohol if you need to. You need to work out what you will do when the guest leaves (you could be held liable if you return alcohol to a young person who then consumes it after leaving and gets into trouble).

## PROVIDE ALTERNATIVES

Have plenty of food and non-alcoholic drinks available (water, non-alcoholic punch, mocktails, fruit juice, soft drinks, etc).

## USEFUL RESOURCES

Use the checklist for hosting a party at [www.adf.org.au/download.asp?RelatedLinkId=255](http://www.adf.org.au/download.asp?RelatedLinkId=255)

For more information on safe partying, see the Party Safe Programs in your state or visit [www.australia.gov.au/drinkingnightmare](http://www.australia.gov.au/drinkingnightmare)

Register your party with the local police at least one week beforehand by using the Party Safe Registration Form from the police web site in your state or territory. This provides the police with the details that they need to know in case they are called to your party to deal with an incident.

For the Alcohol and Drug Information Service helpline in your state or territory see <http://www.alcohol.gov.au/>

# HOSTING OVER 18 PARTIES



It is legal for you to supply alcohol in your home to 18+ teenagers. However, it is your responsibility as a host to ensure the safety of your guests. You may be legally liable and could be charged with civil negligence if a drunken guest causes damage to property or another person.

Teenagers should not be allowed to take alcohol from the party to drink somewhere else. If this is happening you could be held liable.

Make it clear to parents beforehand if you intend to allow alcohol at a party.

Consider hiring a private security guard for your party if you anticipate trouble.

## CONTROL THE FLOW

Don't allow people to BYO. You can control the amount and type of alcohol served if you are managing it yourself. Even still, teens are likely to want to binge drink when alcohol is provided at a party. Use the following strategies to manage this:

- **Maintain a presence.** Adult supervision plays a critical role in reducing excessive drinking among Australian teenagers. However, this does not generally prevent higher risk drinking altogether.
- Establish an agreement between yourself and your teenager about alcohol and adult supervision.
- Appoint a responsible adult to serve the alcohol, and have them take special care to control how much alcohol is consumed.
- Pre-mix drinks to ensure limited and controlled alcohol content.
- Serve only low-alcohol drinks.
- Don't top up drinks.
- Always supply alternatives to alcohol. Serve non-carbonated drinks (juices and water) as "spacers." Avoid serving too many salty foods, as these make people thirsty and encourage them to drink more.
- Plan activities and games that take the focus off drinking.





# ATTENDING A PARTY



## BE INFORMED

As a parent, it is your responsibility to ensure your child's safety. You can let your teenager go to parties with peace of mind, but you need to do your homework first.

Ask questions. Communicate with your son or daughter and with the host parents to confirm:

- Address of the party and contact phone numbers
- Precise start and finish times
- That parents will be present at all times
- That alcohol will not be served at under-eighteen parties

Call the host parents to confirm the details. You might even offer assistance at the same time.

## KEEP IN TOUCH

Ensure that your teenager can contact you in the event that the details change, the party gets out of control or they begin to feel unsafe for any reason. Tell them that they can contact you at any time without question.

## TRANSPORT

Personally transport your son or daughter to and from the venue. Negotiate a pick up time. Go to the door when you drop them off and pick them up. This is important to confirm that all is well. If you are transporting your teenager's friends, first confirm that they are invited to the party.

## NEGOTIATE GROUND RULES

Check with your teenager that you are both clear about what is acceptable behaviour, and the consequences if the rules are broken. Discuss any concerns and negotiate the conditions. Your teenager might feel that you do not trust him or her. Explain that you are concerned about their safety.

## USEFUL RESOURCES

Use the "Parent - Young Person Safe Partying Agreement" at [www.adf.org.au/download.asp?RelatedLinkId=258](http://www.adf.org.au/download.asp?RelatedLinkId=258)





Not only do teenagers who have clearly prescribed parameters regarding their drinking respond well to these guidelines, but those without this guidance can often desire that type of direction.

*Australian Government Research Report, 2005*

## NEGOTIATE BOUNDARIES

Establishing and enforcing limits on teenagers is not easy. However, they are likely to drink less if their parents have established clear boundaries.

These should be discussed with them before anything happens. Agree on boundaries for what is acceptable and stick to these. Make the limits clear and specific. For a young teenager (12-14), set the rules and outline the consequences of breaking them. With older teenagers (15-17), negotiate an agreement about what is acceptable behaviour.

Negotiate appropriate rewards for compliance and consequences if they step outside the established guidelines. For instance, a teenager who sticks to the boundaries might be rewarded with additional independence or responsibility in some way. Make sure you follow through consistently.

Decide on common sense limits that you are comfortable with. For instance:

- Teenagers will not drink alcohol until they are eighteen.
- Teenagers will not attend or stay at teen parties where alcohol is served.
- Teenagers will not get into a car with a driver who has been drinking.

Due to the effects of alcohol on the developing brain, teenagers under sixteen years of age should avoid alcohol.



**THE AUTHOR**

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