

## WHAT YOU CAN DO – TIPS FOR DELAYING YOUR TEEN'S DRINKING

1. Set firm family guidelines which reflect the delay message so that your teen is clear about your expectations and understands your thinking.
2. Discuss the fact that not every teenager is drinking. The truth is that most teenagers under 18 either don't drink or don't drink to excess. Drinking too much, too young is not normal.
3. Talk to your pre-teen or teen about the new brain science which is telling us how alcohol can impair the developing teenage brain and stop them reaching their full potential.
4. Encourage them to get involved in other activities that do not involve drinking, but instead offer challenging opportunities, such as sport and creative pursuits.
5. Discuss the delay message with other parents. Share the knowledge you now have about the new brain science and try to come up with a common standard related to your teenagers and drinking.
6. Consider your own drinking behaviour. Teenagers are still heavily influenced by the role modelling of parents. So, if you drink heavily then expect your teenager to drink at risky levels, too.

The National Health and Medical Research Council's 2009 guidelines for children and young people state that "not drinking at all is the safest option. Parents and carers are advised that children under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking and that for this age group, not drinking is especially important." For teenagers aged 15 to 17 years, the safest option is "to delay the initiation of drinking as long as possible."



IF YOU HAVE PARTICULAR CONCERNS REGARDING YOUR OWN DRINKING, ITS EFFECTS ON YOU OR YOUR FAMILY, CONSULT YOUR GENERAL PRACTITIONER OR ANOTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONAL.



## KIDS AND ALCOHOL DON'T MIX.

# KIDS AND ALCOHOL DON'T MIX.

GET THE FACTS  
[DrinkWise.org.au](http://DrinkWise.org.au)

A PRACTICAL GUIDE  
FOR PARENTS

This brochure is brought to you by DrinkWise Australia, an evidence-based, not-for-profit research and social change organisation that fosters innovative approaches towards developing and maintaining a safer drinking culture in Australia. DrinkWise relies on key independent research and clinical advice. The information in this brochure has been gathered from authoritative studies and knowledge gained in consultation with experts in the fields of neuroscience and child and adolescent psychology.

[DrinkWise.org.au](http://DrinkWise.org.au)



Today's teenagers are drinking at a younger age and at increasingly risky levels. The average age at which teens start to drink alcohol has fallen from 19 to 15.5 years over the past 50 years<sup>1</sup> and one in five 11 year olds has consumed alcohol without parental supervision.<sup>2</sup>

As a doctor in the Accident and Emergency Department of the Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney, I witness first hand the

harm 'drinking to get drunk' causes to adolescent brains and bodies through alcohol-related injuries and violence.

New science is also telling us just how important it is for teenagers to delay the age at which they first drink alcohol.

We now know that alcohol can disrupt teenage brain development, potentially leading to learning, memory and psychological problems.

As a parent, the best thing you can do to help your teen become a happy, healthy adult is to encourage them to delay drinking alcohol for as long as possible.

I know it's a challenge – Australian culture tends to glorify drinking, treating it as a 'rite of passage' for teenagers – but the science is clear: **KIDS AND ALCOHOL DON'T MIX.**

DrinkWise's latest campaign aims to help you do everything you can to delay your teen's drinking. This brochure gives you the scientific facts as well as practical strategies to delay your child's first alcoholic drink.

For more information including issues-based advice related to your child's age visit [www.DrinkWise.org.au](http://www.DrinkWise.org.au)

Dr. Andrew Rochford BMedSc MBBS (Hons)  
Emergency Registrar  
Royal North Shore Hospital, Sydney

<sup>1</sup> Roche et al., 2007. <sup>2</sup> Hayes et al., 2004.

## THE TEENAGE BRAIN AND ALCOHOL – WHY THEY DON'T MIX



Professor Ian Hickie AM, MD, FRANZCP, FASSA  
Executive Director  
The Brain and Mind Research Institute  
University of Sydney

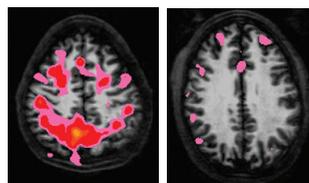
Once upon a time we thought that the teenage brain was the same as an adult brain; that it had already reached full development. But now the science is telling us something very different...

From the age of around 12 or 13 through to the early twenties the brain is in a state of intense development, moulding and hardwiring in readiness for the challenges of adulthood. Through a process called 'frontalisation' the brain is growing and forming all the critical parts it needs for learning, memory, planning, emotional stability and thinking.

The new science tells us that alcohol disrupts brain development during this critical phase of growth. Teenagers who drink alcohol risk their brains not reaching full capacity, which means they might never reach their full potential as an adult.

Therefore, the best advice is to avoid introducing alcohol to your teenager for as long as possible. New research shows that they should not drink until at least the age of 18. Even after that time it is best to minimise alcohol intake until the brain has finished developing around age 23 to 24 years.

Here's why...



The brain on the left belongs to a kid who hasn't started drinking; the brain on the right belongs to a kid who started drinking at age 15.

Source: Dr. Susan F. Tapert, University of California, San Diego

Spot the difference?

From Dr. Susan F. Tapert: "The picture on the left is of a 15 year old healthy non-drinking boy, while he was solving a memory task. The picture on the right is of a 15 year old boy who has been drinking five to six drinks, eight days out of every month for the previous year. Note that the heavy drinker showed less brain activation while doing the memory task. He also did not perform quite as well on the task as the non-drinker."

## THE DELAY MESSAGE – WHY LATER IS BETTER FOR YOUR TEEN

The longer teenagers delay drinking alcohol, the best chance they give their brains to develop fully and to reach their full potential to succeed and be happy in life.

### TOP FIVE REASONS WHY KIDS AND ALCOHOL DON'T MIX

1. From puberty the brain is developing, reaching its full capacity in the early to mid-twenties. Alcohol has the potential to disrupt this crucial window of development.
2. If the brain is not allowed to fully develop, due to alcohol use, then this can lead to many problems such as learning difficulties, cognitive deficits, memory impairment and emotional problems like depression and anxiety.
3. Drinking alcohol too young, with its adverse effects on the developing brain, may mean your teen fails to reach his or her full potential, whether academically, creatively or on the sporting field.
4. Teenage drinking is not just bad for the brain, it's dangerous too. Alcohol inhibits a teenager's ability to consider the consequences of their actions, leading them to take stupid risks like getting in fights, drink driving, unwanted sex or serious accidents.
5. Drinking alcohol can become a negative distraction for teenagers not only from study, but sport, creative pursuits, family life and socialising with friends. These activities are important for building confidence and maturity during the teen years.