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Parent's
5-Point-Plan

KIDS & ALCOHOL DON'T MIX

Strategies for
parents of children
aged 9 to 14 years

DRINKWISE.ORG.AU

You can make a difference

Today's teenagers are drinking at a younger age and at risky levels. The average Australian starts drinking alcohol at 15.5 years; and more than a quarter of our 14-19 year olds are putting themselves at risk of alcohol-related harm at least once a month.

From when your child turns 12 years old until they reach about 24 years their brain is forming all the parts needed for learning, memory, planning, emotional stability, and thinking. Alcohol can disrupt this.

Your child trusts you and relies on you for information and advice. Research shows that they believe that you should teach them about alcohol.

Most Australian parents think that they should start a conversation with their kids on alcohol before they reach 12 years of age. But, talking to kids about alcohol and setting the boundaries and expectations to keep them safe can be a daunting task.

DrinkWise has developed this Parent's 5-Point Plan to provide practical advice on how to be a positive influence and delay your child's introduction to alcohol.

Discuss the issues

Keep the lines of communication open with your kids. Discuss the fact that not everyone drinks.

Be aware that young people are likely to have a favourable perception of the social benefits of alcohol - they seek to drink believing it will help them fit in, and need to know that they can fit in without drinking alcohol.

TIP 1 Highlight that not drinking is the norm for young people. Two-thirds of 12-15 year olds have never had a drink of alcohol.

Let older teens know that they are not alone, with one in five 16-17 year olds sharing in their decision to not drink.

Educate by example

Be a positive role model, use alcohol responsibly. **KIDS ABSORB YOUR DRINKING**, so watch your own alcohol consumption and remember that there is the option of not drinking alcohol at all.

If alcohol does play a role in your family life, talk to your child about how you use alcohol responsibly and the rules and boundaries you follow.

TIP 2 Parents who drink alcohol and have more lenient attitudes towards alcohol are more likely to have adolescents who consume alcohol at risky and high risk levels.

Try not to make every family gathering or celebration focus around alcohol. Make a point of having alcohol-free events to demonstrate to your children that you can enjoy yourself without alcohol.

Listen and engage

Be aware of and show interest in your child's upcoming activities and discuss these (it's an opportunity to set clear expectations). Get to know their friends, and their friend's parents.

TIP 3 Knowing your kid's friends' parents gives you the advantage of knowing where your child is and enables you to discuss and develop a common position on things like drinking alcohol so that the kids are hearing one strong and united voice. If they don't agree with your position at least they know your views and will be better placed to respect them.

Be comfortable in the knowledge that you are in the majority- choosing to 'delay your child's introduction to alcohol'. Most Australian's believe that it is unacceptable for under 18s to be allowed to drink at parties; and most Australian parents believe it is unacceptable for children under 18 to drink.

A good relationship

Work on developing and maintaining a good parent-child relationship based on clear and open communication. Parent-child relationships characterised by emotional warmth and support, trust, involvement and attachment are associated with lower levels of adolescent alcohol misuse.

TIP 4 Kids who feel their parents are caring, concerned and supportive start alcohol use later and drink less. Be there to support them as hormonal changes, school commitments and peer influence build.

To get the facts and more advice on the best ways to talk about alcohol with your kids visit drinkwise.org.au

Your expectations

Delaying your child's first drink requires making your expectations regarding alcohol very clear. Not just to your child, but to the other adult influencers in their lives.

Every family is different and boundaries and expectations need to be consistent with what you believe.

TIP 5 Involve your child in the development of the rules; your child needs to understand why the rules exist in the first place. They may not like the rules you set but it is vital they can see what your concerns are and how you hope to address them.

Think about who bought or gave you your first drink/s... have you had a chat with the equivalent person in your child's life?