

How to talk with teenagers about alcohol use

Speaker Key:

LS Dr. Lexine Stapinski
SA Professor Steve Allsop

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00:00:00	LS	Good morning to those in WA, Northern Territory, South Australia, and WA, I've already said, and just gone good afternoon to those in the eastern states. Thank you so much for joining us for the webinar today. And this is one in a series of webinars that we have as part of Positive Choices and we're really, really fortunate today to have with us Professor Steve Allsop, who will be joining us for a Q & A style format about how to talk to teenagers about alcohol use.
00:00:36		And some of you have already sent questions through for the session, so thank you for those. Those have been used to structure the session for today. And you'll also have the opportunity to send in questions during the session as well, so you can do that through your control panel, so just typing questions into the question box.
00:00:59		So, my name is Lexine Stapinski. I'll be facilitating the session for today and in a moment, I will introduce Steve, but before I do, I just wanted to let you know quickly a little bit about Positive Choices, if you're joining us for the first time today. So, this project aims to assist teachers, parents, and students across Australia to access accurate, up to date information about alcohol and drugs and prevention strategies. And as part of that, we provide this webinar series for parents, teachers, school leaders, and anyone working with young people.
00:01:35		And we've covered a number of topics over the year, this year, and so, if you've missed any of our topics, they are available to be watched on demand on our website. So, you can access those by going to Positive Choices dot org dot AU, resources, webinars, and some of the topics, you might be interested in a topic on personality targeted prevention initiatives, or intervention, sorry.
00:02:01		How to engage your students with evidence-based drug education, drug and alcohol in the maturing adolescent brain, and coming up in 2018, we'll have new topics as well that we'll

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		be introducing, including one early in the year on substance use prevention for Aboriginal Non-Torres Strait Islander use. So, for more information about that, or to have a look at the resources that we do have on Positive Choices, I'd encourage you to visit our website.
00:02:33		And also, we're always looking for feedback about the site and about topics that you want to see there, so please do send us an email or fill in our feedback form to let us know what topics you'd like within our webinar series. So now, that is definitely enough of me talking. In a moment, I will introduce our guest for today, but, as I mentioned, the topic today is on how to talk to young people about alcohol.
00:03:03		And before we start, I just wanted to take a quick audience poll, so you should see that up on your screen now. And what we just want to know from you is, what do you think, in terms of who has the most significant role in preventing alcohol problems among teenagers? Do you think government, do you think schools, do you think parents, or do you think peers?
00:03:29		And we're just collecting your responses at the moment, while Steve waits with baited breath to see what the response is. So, most people have voted now, that's very interesting. What I will do now is introduce Steve. We're so glad to have him with us today. Steve has worked for over 35 years.
00:04:01		Sorry, Professor Steve Allsop, I should say, has worked for over 35 years in the drug field. He has managed prevention, policy, and treatment services and worked as a senior researcher in universities. And until September 2016, he was director of the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University. He has three young adult children and he is also an Australian Rules football tragic, working with a number of elite clubs and was president of a large junior football club.
00:04:29		So, welcome, Steve. It's so great to have you with us.
	SA	Good afternoon, or good morning, wherever you are.
	LS	And just to let you know the results of the poll. We actually had, so 71% of our audience thought, well, shall I tell you the results of the poll or shall we keep them a secret?
	SA	Tell us.

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	LS	71% thought parents had the most important role, so that's very interesting.
00:04:57		So, as I mentioned, this session is just going to be a Q & A format, so the first question that I have for you, Steve, is, for young people, what is the biggest alcohol-related problem?
	SA	Well, obviously on an individual level, it's the problems that they may be experiencing at the time, but, in fact, whilst a lot of people, quite rightly, get concerned about the drinking of young people, one of the concerns I would have is also that young people are strongly affected by the drinking of other people, and that's often forgotten in our responses.
00:05:31		So, that might be the drinking of a peer, a total stranger, if they're injured in a car accident, but also the drinking of their elder siblings, and, of course, the drinking of adults, of us. So, a lot of young people are affected by other people's drinking, even if they don't drink, themselves.
	LS	So, what would you say are the most common type of alcohol problems that young people face?
00:06:01	SA	If you look at the evidence, it tells us that things like injuries, either from accidents, car accidents, injuries out on the footpath, or from violence, and, of course, things like drownings, which are maybe mentioned at particular times of year, but a significant proportion of drownings are alcohol-related. If you wanted to summarise it, you'd say that most of the harms that arise in young people are related to the short-term effects of alcohol.
00:06:32		And the intoxication, drunkenness. Whilst there are some young people who get severe organ damage, if you like, from regular heavy drinking, some become dependent, they're relatively small numbers. The majority of the harm comes from intoxication.
	LS	So, is there a safe level of drinking, then, for young people?
	SA	The problem here is, we simply don't know.
00:06:59		I was part of the NHMRC Guideline Committee that looked at alcohol and we came to the conclusion that, whilst we could identify what might be low-risk drinking for 18 to 65 years olds, we simply didn't know what low-risk drinking was for people under the age of 18. And we do know that there are increased

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		risks for people under the age of 18, and we might talk about that later, but that was why we came to the conclusion that, in fact, the safest option is not to drink.
00:07:34		But if people did drink, they certainly shouldn't drink more than the low-risk limits for, or low-risk guidelines for adults. And we also thought that, if they did drink, they should always drink under the supervision of adults. So, the fact is, we simply don't know what the risk is. We have some evidence to suggest that the younger you are, the greater the risk.
00:08:00		And we might talk about some of those specific risks later on, but the safest option for under-18s was determined to not drink.
	LS	And so, can you tell us a little bit about why young people drink and perhaps there are some models from research to help us understand this?
	SA	Yes, this is the only place, for people watching, that I'm going to use some slides. I'm just going to use a few slides to help us through this. If people who are watching think, why do you use coffee, if you do drink coffee or tea?
00:08:35		There's no single reason why that might be the case. You might drink coffee because you enjoy the flavour, because of the drug effects, because everybody else does it around you, it symbolises a break, so there's a variety of reasons why people might use coffee. Similarly, there's a variety of reasons why young people might drink alcohol. So, people do it for fun, because it symbolises adulthood, because their mates are doing it, because they've seen their parents do it.
00:09:03		Maybe because they're trying to cope with incredible pressures in their daily lives. But I think it's useful to look at a couple of models that help us understand drug use and drug-related problems, but in this case, alcohol use in particular. So, first, whether or not somebody experiences a problem is related to, and if we can have the first slide, problems related to intoxication.
00:09:34		So, go to the next slide now, if you ask a lot of people in the community what concerns them about alcohol, a lot of the things they'll give you are related to the acute effects of alcohol, whether it be hangovers, road traffic accidents, violence, the threat of violence, reputational damage, and you don't need to be a severe chronic problem drinker to experience problems of intoxication.

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00:10:00		<p>I might never have drank alcohol before in my life. I'm not alcohol-dependent. I'm not a severe chronic drinker. But if I go out tonight and drink 15 beers, any number of severe consequences could arise for me and for people around me. So, a lot of concern in the community and, in fact, a lot of concern in relation to young people, particularly those under the age of 18, is intoxication, because the pattern of drinking tends to be much more sporadic around heavy occasional drinking.</p>
00:10:29		<p>If I go to the next slide, we can see there are also problems related to regular use, the steady drip, drip, drip of alcohol into your system. If I go and have a couple of beers at lunchtime and then have a couple of beers on the way home from work, maybe have a beer or two, or a glass of wine, with dinner, maybe I pour a whiskey after dinner, if I drink in that way every day, I'm not going to get problems of intoxication. I'm not going to become intoxicated. But if I drink in that way every day, I may well experience problems related to regular use.</p>
00:11:00		<p>They may be economic, in terms of my finances, or they may be health, in terms of the constant organ damage. And then the final area, if we go to the next slide, are problems related to dependence. A lot of people think that's all we're talking about when we talk about drug use and alcohol problems. There's no doubt there's a group of people in the middle who have problems with intoxication and regular use and dependence. They're the sort of people we find in our drug treatment services or our alcohol treatment services.</p>
00:11:29		<p>But they're not the only people who experience harm and the evidence tells us that most of the harms for young people, and particularly for teenagers, revolve around problems of intoxication. And that's important to remember, because that influences the sort of interventions that we might have, what we do to prevent drink driving or intoxication-related violence. It's quite different from what we might do to prevent, for example, cirrhosis of the liver. And whilst some young people do get organ damage from very heavy consistent drinking, that's not the most common problems that we see.</p>
00:12:07		<p>Now, if we can go to the next slide, and the goes to the issue that you raised, why do young people drink and get into difficulty? Well, a model that helps me is a risk and protective factors model. So, risk factors might be: some people have genetic vulnerability if their parents were heavy drinkers, have alcohol dependence, they may be more at risk.</p>

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00:12:32		Some people have poor problem solving or conduct disorder or poorly managed ADHD, or foetal exposure, and so foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. Those young people might be more at risk of alcohol problems. And then there are family factors, if parents have favourable attitudes to alcohol, if drinking at an early age is accepted, or even encouraged.
00:12:59		If there's an environment that's not secure, if there's a lot of disharmony, if there's poor communication, people exposed to traumatic events, and, of course, people who are living in horrible circumstances, poor housing, poor recreation opportunities are much more at risk. And then the other is availability and you see on that side I've written actual and perceived, so how easily available we make alcohol, literally, in terms of hours of sale, age at which people can access it, how cheap it is.
00:13:36		All of that can make a difference. When I say perceived, if people think that lots of their friends are drinking heavily and everyone else is drinking, then maybe they're more inclined to consume. And, in fact, there is some evidence that a lot of young people overestimate how much their peers drink and then drink to match that overestimation.
00:14:02		So, that's why it's important for us to challenge the perceived norms around drinking. So there are some of the risk factors. If we go to the other side, in the next slide, so we go to the protective factors, we can see the things protect young people from harm. So, the quality of life, children who live in a supportive, harmonious environment and, really, one word, I think, can sum up the protective factors.
00:14:30		And that's connectedness. Children who are well-connected to adults, who are well-connected to school, and by that I don't just mean turning up, but socially and academically competent. Children who are well-connected to their community. And in the US, the research said spiritual connectedness and they meant religion. Now, I don't think it's restricted to religion. You mentioned at the beginning, I'm a football tragic and I support Fremantle Dockers.
00:14:59		And that's a purely spiritual experience because they've never delivered anything tangible. It's a matter of faith that's yet to be delivered upon. But I think it's about being connected to things that are about material gain, so whether that be a football club, a tennis club, volunteering in your community, being engaged in

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		other things within the community. The evidence tells us that connectedness is a good preventer.
00:15:31		So, if we go to the next slide, how do these things relate to each other? So, if we go to the next slide, this is a useful model that was developed by a researcher called Simberg, and he talked about substance, set, and setting, but I prefer, whilst that's nice alliteration, I prefer, there are things to do with the drug, how much people drink matters, but there are things to do with the individual, their age, their health, their wellbeing, and their sex.
00:15:58		We know there's a difference between men and women in terms of what might be risky alcohol consumption. And then things to do with the environment or the context. So, for example, if you look at, under the drug heading, if you knew somebody was drinking four beers, you might not be concerned if you found out that he was a 25 year old male who was perfectly healthy. But if you go down to the environment, if he's doing that on an empty stomach before he drives a car or operates machinery, the risk changes.
00:16:28		And so, in order to understand drug use and alcohol use and alcohol-related problems, and if we want to address risk in the community, we need to do things about the availability of the drug, for example, we need to do things about individual risk factors, ensure that people are well-educated, well-informed. We identify those who are most vulnerable and we also need to address particular contexts that are highly risky.
00:16:58		So, for example, random breath-testing is a way in which we can reduce risk in the community. Even if people do drink heavily, at least we can prevent alcohol-related harm, both for the consumer and for other people. So, if we go to the, this is the final slide, I promise, there are no more after this, so how do risk and protective factors relate? Well, it can influence directly, but they can also influence in an interactive way.
00:17:31		So, for example, somebody who is highly impulsive may be more at risk of alcohol use, but that might not result in heavy alcohol use, unless alcohol is easily available or if it's perceived that it's okay amongst your peers to do that. We know that if parents are heavy drinkers, that increases the risk of children being at risk, but, on the other hand, we also know that that can be ameliorated if parents set clear boundaries and provide a quality loving environment for their children.

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00:18:03		So, that's not saying it's all right for parents to drink as much as they want. It's just saying that these things can influence each other. And then, of course, in relation to children and teenagers...
	LS	Oh, Steve, I've lost volume on you there.
	SA	Yes, just, it seems to be at your end. I think we have a slow connection.
00:18:29		I think that might be better. Has that come back?
	LS	Yes, yes, that's excellent, you're back now. Sorry, if you could just go back about maybe 20 words?
	SA	So, in relation to young people, teenagers and children in particular, also the timing of exposure to it can influence what then happens. We know that young people, people who begin drinking heavily at an earlier age, are more at risk from harm than from a biological and a social point of view.
00:19:03		And we also know that young people who begin drinking heavily at an earlier age are more at risk of problems later on down the track, whether they be mental health problems, other drug use, or, indeed, dependence on alcohol. So, rather than trying to find a single reason why people might drink or why they might experience problems, I think it's important to recognise that strong interaction amongst these factors.
00:19:32		And that tells us that simply telling young people about the dangers of alcohol, for example, is likely to be insufficient. It means we need to have investment in prevention strategies about how easily accessible is alcohol, is there an environment that really needs to be enriched so that we reduce the chances that people use alcohol or get into trouble with alcohol, what the parents need to do, what do we need to do about the constant barrage of information about it's good to drink that comes through popular media?
00:20:09		So, it tells us no single strategy is going to be sufficient. We need an integrated approach.
	LS	There's a lot of information in there. That's fantastic. We'll go through and unpack some of those suggestions in more detail. Now, just one thing that I just wanted to ask a follow-up question.

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00:20:30		You were talking about that mismatch between how much young people perceive their friends to be using and how much they are actually using. I just wondered, because we hear about this a lot, is that exaggeration a factor, that kids are exaggerating how much they are drinking? Or are there other factors involved?
	SA	I think it can be people exaggerating.
00:20:57		But I think it's also about if we live in a society where alcohol sales is at every event, every sporting event, every school concert, every function, then, firstly, we create a notion that alcohol is very much an integral part to how we socialise, how we relax, and so on. And that's a powerful message. Of course, the alcohol promotions can add to that.
00:21:28		But then, I think sometimes it is about young people exaggerating about what they might have done, but also, I think, it's just a confusion. And it is to do with the norms. And I think, sometimes, unfortunately, our campaigns can add to this. If we run a health campaign that says all young people are drinking heavily, then, unfortunately, that can reinforce the view and contribute to a norm, if everybody else is drinking heavily, maybe I should too. So, I think it's important that we encourage a challenge of those norms.
00:22:01		It's not about minimising the real problems that exist out there, but also recognising, and this will come up later on, that, in fact, a lot of young people under the age of 18, and increasing numbers of young people under the age of 18, are not drinking.
	LS	Yes, increasing numbers. All right, well, tell us then, Steve, how do young people learn about alcohol? And a second part of that question, where are they getting alcohol from, given that they are underage?
00:22:32	SA	An important point to make there is that in Australia, we shouldn't necessarily use the term underage because it's access to alcohol unlicensed premises or to purchase alcohol from licensed premises, it doesn't mean that they can't drink in other venues. So, that's important to recognise. Where do people learn of alcohol?
00:23:00		I was influenced by, and this is a long time ago and shows how old I am, a research colleague called Phil Aiken in Scotland in the 1980s did a study where he simply got children to sort liquid containers. And these were very young, these were five year

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		olds, to sort them into different piles. And from that study, it demonstrated very clearly, they'd got a clear understanding of this is alcohol and this is lemonade.
00:23:29		They were able to differentiate alcoholic content, so the notion of alcohol occurs and what it is. They were also able to identify behaviours that were intoxicated behaviours and identify that this had come from drinking too much alcohol. So, where does that come from? It comes from watching us as adults. It comes from being out in the street. It comes from watching television and, unfortunately, from going to sporting fixtures where alcohol is advertised.
00:23:58		Again, I had a student, an Honours student who did research with, she had some pictures of sporting venues, and she got the children to colour them in, and she got them to colour in the alcohol, sorry, she got them to colour in the advertising hoardings, which had nothing in. And they had mostly pictures of alcoholic beverages on the alcohol hoardings at the sporting venues. And then, she asked them to identify previous leaders, Australian prime ministers.
00:24:32		And they were, on average, they were able to identify two, and this was around about the time that there'd been a change in the ministership, so it was relatively recent. And then, she asked them how many alcoholic beverages they could identify and, on average, they could identify 25. So, at a very young age, children have a clear idea of what alcohol is and they learn it from a variety of sources, particularly in our society.
00:24:58		And they learn good and not so good things about alcohol. Where do they get it from? Largely, they get it from peers, siblings, and from parents, sometimes. I'm now talking about those who are under 18. Unfortunately, a significant proportion seem to get it easily from bottle shops as well and I think that while a lot of people in the industry do do the right thing, some don't. I recall my daughter, when she was at school, telling me about a bottle shop that was serving people from the school.
00:25:33		And their defence was that a lot of the young women looked over 18, which I can understand, but the fact that they were in school uniform might have been a little bit of a giveaway. So, I think one of the things we have to do is recognise that young people get alcohol from friends, parents, siblings, but they do sometimes also get it from bottle shops and we should enforce

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		the law. And that means supporting those in the industry who do the right thing and lots of them do.
00:26:01		But we should hold to account those who don't.
	LS	And so, on that issue of supply, I guess, is it okay to give a young person small amounts of alcohol? And I think you said before, it's best to be under supervision. So, is it a good idea to be introducing them, the ones that are introducing them to alcohol?
	SA	This is one of the view great myths about, well, if you introduce young people to alcohol at an early age and give them small sips of alcohol.
00:26:36		Now, I used to sway a little bit towards that view that you don't suddenly learn to drink on your 18 th birthday and your drinking skills are gift-wrapped at the bottom of your bed, but something changed my mind about that. Firstly, there's no evidence that's around that giving alcohol to children under the age of 18 actually improves matters. There's no evidence about that.
00:27:00		And there is some evidence that if you do give alcohol to children under the age of 18, they actually tend to drink more. So, that changed my mind a little bit, but, really, and I actually know this question's coming up, but maybe I'll pre-empt it. One of the things that changed my mind, I did think that maybe when my children, my own children got to 17, say, at special events, Christmas, birthdays, some sort of family event, I might allow them access to a small glass of wine.
00:27:38		What changed my mind on this matter, personally, was the evidence that arose around alcohol and the impact on the developing brain. So, maybe I could go to that, because I think it relates to the answer to this question.
00:27:57		So, what's happened is, improved technology has allowed us to assess more subtle impacts of alcohol, so at one point, we sort of had, well, there's gross brain damage, but we don't know what happens before that, but modern technology has allowed us to investigate this much better. And now there is evidence that the brain is developing, the teenage brain is developing up until the age of about 25.
00:28:30		I shouldn't reference, well, I was about to reference one of my own children, but I'd better not. But the brain is developing until the age of 25 and there's evidence now that alcohol doesn't

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		necessarily mix with the developing brain. And what it's allowed us, the research has allowed us to do is to suggest that there is a subtle impact. It might be the difference between getting a B+ and a C+ and you might not be aware of it in your day to day living. It's not that it's gross brain damage.
00:28:59		But instead of getting a B+, you get a C+. Now, the sorts of things it influences is your problem-solving ability, maybe memory, but, essentially, your higher order cognitions, your ability to think and problem-solve. And also, it may, if you drink heavily, it may affect things like impulse control and so on, which then can exacerbate the risk of heavy drinking and risk-taking whilst intoxicated.
00:29:29		But, as a scientist, I look at a lot of the research and I might say, well, look, it's a small number of studies and a small, relatively small samples of humans. A lot of the evidence is based on animal studies. So, as a scientist, I might say, well, I might be a bit cautious with that. As a parent, it was sufficient to totally change my mind. So, I talked to my children about, I'd rather delay the onset of use for as long as possible, and so I said to them, I'd rather you didn't drink and these are the reasons why.
00:30:02		I'd rather you didn't drink until you were 18, 19, but if you do drink, if you decide to, well, not ignore that advice, but not take that advice, then at least if you do drink I'd rather we talked about it and I know about it. And you drink in the presence of adults. So, delaying the onset, I think, makes good sense.
00:30:30		Because I think there is sufficient reason to say look, it could well have this impact and the difference between a B+ and a C+ might be the difference between the sort of career and lifestyle you can get.
	LS	That's really interesting. It links to another question from one of our audience members about what are some of the most persuasive stories or ideas to be getting across to teenagers when you're talking to them about alcohol?
00:31:00		And I guess we know that some of the wrong turn health consequences that you might talk about don't feel relevant to teenagers, but you're talking about communicating with your children about those cognitive effects. Do you feel like that's a more relevant consequence to be talking about with young people that they potentially do take on-board?

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	SA	I think it could be. The point being there are supervisor, somebody doing a PhD a number of years ago, and I'm going to summarise it very grossly.
00:31:32		But essentially, he looked at what health professionals and adults were concerned about and he looked at what children were concerned about in relation to alcohol, and it was an inverse relationship. So, people like me might be concerned about brain injury and liver cirrhosis, but young people might be more concerned about how it affects their reputation. And it's that reputational damage, the risk of sexual exploitation and, of course, now that going up on the Internet as a permanent record.
00:32:02		Those sorts of things resonate with young people, educational capabilities, and sporting capabilities. So, I think one of the things to do is, it might be appropriate to share your concerns with a young person. In fact, I think it is appropriate to share your concerns with a young person. But I think what's most important is also, don't assume they'll share those and spend all your time fighting to make them agree with you.
00:32:30		Find out what concerns them, and it might be quite different. and some of the ways that you can talk about this is to talk about, a lot of young people have seen other people affected by alcohol, whether that be they've seen, and, in fact, in one of the studies we did with young people who were heavy drinkers, a lot of them had seen violence, had felt threatened by someone else who was intoxicated.
00:32:57		So, sometimes it's less threatening to talk about what happens to other people as opposed to directly talking to a young person about them. So, talking about, have you seen this happen to other people? Have you seen this happen to friends? What concerns you about this? What could you do to avoid this? What might worry you about if you got over-intoxicated, if you got intoxicated, what would you be most worried about?
00:33:28		So, talking to young people about what concerns them and not assuming that that will coincide with what concerns you. As I say, it's still legitimate to say, well, I'm worried about potential impact on your brain development, but if they say, well, I'm not worried about that, you say, that's okay, I worry about that. But what is it that concerns you? That's most important. That's more likely to have influence on young people and it's also going to mean that they're going to think that they're being heard.

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00:34:00	LS	So, some people might think, be thinking surely it's only a minority of young people who get into difficulty with alcohol and also, one thing you mentioned earlier, it seems like at the moment there's some information saying that alcohol use is going down among young people, so do we actually have anything to be worried about here?
	SA	Let's do it in reverse. So, you're absolutely right.
00:34:29		There's good evidence with good news that there are fewer young people drinking and that they're drinking at a later age, which delaying the onset of drinking, if that's a good thing, and it is. They're really good public health stories. The problem is that some of their mates are making up for it and what we seem to have is a polarisation amongst young people in terms of drinking, and some adults as well.
00:34:59		So, for example, whilst we're seeing more young people who don't drink or who delay drinking, we've also got more young people who are drinking very heavily and this is manifested in terms of the number of people, those increases in the number of young people who turn up in our emergency departments. And just in Western Australia, and I'm sure it's the same in other jurisdictions, there was evidence presented in a recent case where something like 250 young people under the age of 18 had transported in ambulances to hospitals in Western Australia, because they're intoxicated on alcohol.
00:35:40		And there were significant numbers of young people dying. So, on the one hand I think we have to welcome the good news, that lots of young people don't drink, but we've also got to remember that even if they don't drink, they can still be affected by another person's drinking. They can get in a car with a drink driver. They can be hit crossing the road by a drink driver.
00:36:00		If their parents are heavy drinkers. So, unfortunately, those figures are far too high and a large proportion of young people report that they've been physically abused by someone in the last 12 months who is intoxicated on alcohol. The other is that, amongst those who are heavy drinkers, something like 12% to 15% of young people report high risk drinking that's likely to result in injury every week or every month.
00:36:32		And, really, half of heavy drinkers, young heavy drinkers, report that they've drunk so much that they can't remember what happened the night before. So, that's suggesting that there's

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		still a large proportion of, so we welcome the good news, but there's a large proportion of young people who are still drinking very heavily and who can create significant harm, not just for themselves, but for everyone else around them.
00:37:01	LS	So, from your point of view, could you summarise for us your concerns, then, about young people and drinking?
	SA	Look, as a parent as well as a researcher, somebody involved in public health, I think heavy, episodic drinking, so people who drinks lots on occasions, is a concern.
00:37:29		And around that, the risk of injury, the risk of violence, the risk of sexual exploitation, so a lot of people who are intoxicated may be victims of sexual predators, doing something that you later regret, the risk of anything happening in an emergency department, and, indeed, a career totally undone because you've done something, it's been video-taped, and it's up there for employers and everyone else to see.
00:38:01		The dreadful impact on family to have children who get into difficulty, that phone call after midnight that people absolutely dread. So, I think, for me, it's about the intoxication and I think, also, the fact that some young people get far too easy access to alcohol.
00:38:28		And I think the fact that young people are assailed by constant promotions about why alcohol is essential to the good life, I think we have to address that. And then I think an emerging issue, for me, is concern about if it is having impact on people's capacity in terms of brain development, we need to be much more considered about what we say about alcohol, the risks of alcohol, and how young people get access to alcohol.
00:39:01	LS	Is it true, thought, that peer pressure is the main influence on young people? So, really, what adults think doesn't matter as much.
	SA	I think peer pressure is relevant, but it's given far too much emphasis. I remember the advertiser, I think it is, in Adelaide when I lived there, they do a survey every year of a large number of young people.
00:39:34		I can't remember the number. It was something like 1,500 young people. And a journalist phoned me up and said, only two percent of them say that peer pressure, they must be wrong. And I think we need to recognise that it's probably more

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		to do with peer preference than peer pressure. People don't necessarily put our arms up our backs to make us drink, but what happens is, we choose people that we'd like to be with and like to be liked.
00:40:02		And we do things that we think that they value, so it's that peer preference, if you like, and we tend to go with people who we think will like us. So, you don't see too many abstainers going out every Friday night with heavy drinkers, so we tend to be influenced by the people around us, but we're also, what we value influences who we choose as peers.
00:40:29		And there's no doubt that, as children get a wee bit older, as they get to 14, 15, 16, peers take a far more important role in their lives. But parents can still influence that. Parents can influence who the peers are. And I don't just mean saying, don't, but creating opportunities to be part of environments and context. So, in another area, I had a parent talk to me, a friend, about anxiety about her child.
00:41:02		And his spending time with someone who was clearly taking him into risk. And I said, well, you can just say, don't see Johnny anymore, but that's just likely to build up resentment. One of the options might be, he really likes doing X, and I won't say what X was, because that might give away the person.
00:41:28		But he really likes, and let's make it, so he really likes football. So, why don't you spend some energy getting him involved and engaged in football with people who aren't doing this? So, rather than just saying no, you can influence who the peers are and also, there's very good evidence from a variety of cultures and communities that parents who express their values...
00:42:00		I'm not talking about being overly authoritarian, but parents who express their expectations and their values and monitor their children's behaviour, and so it's not following them around town, but it's about knowing where they are, knowing who they're with, knowing what the risk might be. The evidence tells us that those children are much less likely of developing alcohol problems and, in fact, there's some evidence that instituting those, if you like, monitoring knowing where your child is, reduces consumption amongst those who have already started.
00:42:36		I think the other thing that parents can do is talk to other parents. And also, we now have in a number of jurisdictions, laws that forbid giving alcohol to underage, under the age of 18 children, and I think that's really important, not to see lots of

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		prosecutions. I had an experience with my daughter, when she was going, at 15, 16, she was going to a party.
00:43:02		And I rang up and said, is alcohol going to be available, and the mum said, oh no, no, don't worry, she doesn't need to bring any, we've got lots. And I said, hang on a minute, you're missing the point here, I actually don't want my daughter drinking. And the law helps me say that, because I can say it's against the law for you to supply alcohol to my daughter. And so, I think parents can start having influences and without overly becoming unpopular with their children.
00:43:33		My daughter's 18 th birthday, when she had lots of people coming, I said, if people bring alcohol and they're under the age of 18, it's not going to come in. And if they're bringing alcohol, I want to see confirmation from their parents that that's okay. My daughter went, you're not going to do that. But I did. So, we can have a significant influence, even as children get older.
00:44:01	LS	And I think it was a really interesting point that you made about influencing peers through that connection, coming back to what you said right at the start of the webinar, that connection with other activities, other things, other passions that the young people might be developing, and that being a pathway for influencing peers. So, that's a really great suggestion for everyone. So, at what age, then, do you think it's a good idea to start talking about alcohol with your children?
00:44:32	SA	Well, obviously, what you talk about might be influenced by their age, but I think, given that, even at a very young age, children have a notion of what it is, then we should acknowledge that, and certainly by age nine, ten we should be talking about alcohol. But we shouldn't necessarily be talking about when you go out drinking, but we should be talking about perhaps what it is. We should be thinking about our own modelling.
00:44:59		We should be thinking about their exposure to alcohol promotions at that age. And there are rules that say we shouldn't have alcohol adverts on television while children are watching it, except when it's a sporting event. So, I think we, as a community, we perhaps need to think about that, the legitimacy of that regulation. And I think we can talk about how they might be affected by other people and how they protect themselves from other people. As they get older, I think we start having that conversation about what our expectations might be.

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00:45:31		And also, how they can protect themselves from harm. We have some small evidence that suggests that young people who've talked to their parents, not only about what their expectations are, but how they might reduce risk to themselves from their own and other people's drinking, are much less at risk. So, I think that, as they go into high school, those sorts of conversations might occur.
	LS	So, we've spoken a lot about parents.
00:46:01		And just to change tack a little bit here, I'm just interested to know what you think community, schools, and government can do? And I find it fascinating that on our poll, zero percent said that schools would have the most significant influence, so really not seeing a role there at all for schools. Could you speak some about what those broader users or people can do about this?
	SA	Well, it's not about a one hour lecture on the dangers of alcohol at school.
00:46:33		And I think that notion that schools should combat what's going on in the community, and I'll steal a line from a colleague of mine who works at the Australian Drug Foundation, but you can't set fantastic objectives for schools where they're going to combat easy availability in the community and parents drinking lots. The schools have a role. Schools have an important role, as I said at the beginning, engaging young people at school.
00:47:00		And recognising that those who are becoming disconnected from school are at higher risk. That might be a way of saying, well, we need to engage, not necessarily talk to them about alcohol, but engage them. There's also some evidence that school alcohol, developed by some colleagues here, and there's a project that I'm involved in with your colleagues, looking at school drug education can make a difference. I'm just noticing that, oh, you disappeared.
00:47:31		So, I wondered if the Internet line had gone down. So, we know that schools can have a role and we know that K to 12 well-resourced school drug education delivered at appropriate age challenges does make a difference, but you can't do that on its own and it's not just about a few hours of school drug education. It's about engaging children in school and building up their social competence, building up their academic competence.

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00:47:59		In vulnerable communities, where children don't necessarily get into school, much more active investment in getting them into the school system, but it also about governments regulating how alcohol is made available. And having a debate across our community, how do we want alcohol to be made available to children, is it all right for other adults to give alcohol to children, is it all right for people to flout the law about not serving alcohol to underage clientele? What do we do about school?
00:48:30		What do we do about the festival season to ensure alcohol availability is addressed? What do we do about the constant exposure of young people to alcohol promotion? So, the governments can take a significant role there. And we know alcohol availability, young people are particularly affected by changes in availability in alcohol in our community. And then I think the whole community, I think we need to have debates about how does a community build connectedness for young people?
00:49:03		How does a community engage people recreationally? If the people live in impoverished environments, how do we build those impoverished environments to be much more enriched? How do we ensure access to sport, to other recreational opportunities, to art? And I think it's also about having a debate in our community about what we expect from those who sell alcohol?
00:49:30		What do we expect from those who manufacture alcohol? And for communities to start putting pressure on governments to say, the current levels of harm are absolutely unacceptable.
	LS	Well, we've got six more minutes left of the webinar, so I will just remind people in the audience, if you do have any additional questions that Steve hasn't yet touched on, to send those through now and quickly try to fit them in in the remaining time that we do have.
00:50:03		So, we actually have had some requests for transcripts of this webinar. I'm not sure if it's too impromptu to have a formalised transcript, but we may be able to provide something after the session. And, certainly, the recording is available as well. So, as we start to sum up, can you summarise for us, what are some of the things that are increasing risk for young people?
00:50:30	SA	I think the sections of what their friends are doing. I think alcohol promotions and alcohol products, the sweet products

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		that don't taste of alcohol attract some people into drinking. I think the confusion that exists among some adults and parents about what the best thing is. I think parents and other adults in the community can have a significant role.
00:50:59		I think the cheap availability of some very, very cheap products that just make it very easy for people to drink heavily. And I think sometimes people become disconnected from their community, from schools, living in impoverished environments. And the norms that exist around alcohol, that it's a legitimate, okay thing to do to get drunk. And the fact that alcohol is not treated with the respect its due.
00:51:30		And what I mean by that is, alcohol is a drug. An illustration would be, people well understand the risks of heroin overdose, but people don't even recognise alcohol overdose. They'll say oh, Steve's had a big night, he's snoring, he's sleeping it off, but that's actually my respiratory system struggling because I've drunk so much and maybe I need to be taken to hospital, maybe an ambulance needs to be called, maybe somebody needs to sit with me all night.
00:51:58		But, really, in fact, I think if you think somebody has overdosed, you don't take a gamble, you actually call an ambulance. And I think that's what I mean by treating alcohol with more respect as a drug with the potential for harm.
	LS	And one of the questions which has come through from our audience is about that parental role modelling and kids seeing their parents drinking alcohol. Do you think that parents need to become better role models?
	SA	It does make a difference. The evidence is consistent on that.
00:52:31		But it doesn't mean that you can, you can still have a discussion about what you expect and what your expectations are for them around alcohol, and you can set guidelines and rules in discussion with your child. One of the things would be, don't be doing that at two in the morning after you've had a few whiskeys and tempers are already frayed. Choose your moment. Have ongoing conversations with your children.
00:52:57		When they're about to go off on, at this time of year, on leave or celebrations, schools, therapists, parents should be talking to each other and should be talking to children and getting them to tell you what are the risks, how are they going to look after themselves, and making sure that they call for help if they do

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		get into difficulty. And talking to children about how they can look after a mate who gets into difficulty is a really good way, a non-threatening way, of teaching them how to look after themselves.
00:53:30		How are they going to avoid harm caused by other people who are intoxicated? How to walk away from violence, how to seek help if they feel threatened, all of these are important conversations to have. Not one off, but over a period of time.
	LS	And I guess there might be concerns that teenagers are just going to shut down a conversation about alcohol, but would you suggest that some of those talking about how to help a friend might be a way to approach the conversation?
00:53:58	SA	I think so and I think it's really important to be prepared to listen, to recognise, as we said at the beginning, that what influences a young person might be quite different, so be prepared to listen and have some of your views challenged. If you do that, if you're prepared to negotiate, which I understand as a parent is sometimes hard to do, but if you're prepared to negotiate, you're going to get much better influence. And talking about what might happen to a mate and how to look after a mate is a very non-threatening way to actually educate them about themselves.
00:54:35		But the evidence tells us, if you have those conversations, they're likely to do better.
	LS	And then, any final words for us, Steve, about the influence of parents and families, and some of the things that might be protective for young people, which we're touched on already, but just to summarise that for us?
00:54:57	SA	I think we, as adults, need to become more informed about alcohol and about how it affects young people, and about how to have conversations with young people, whether we be therapists, whether we be school teachers, whether we be parents. We need to be prepared to have ongoing conversations. We need to be prepared to be challenged and negotiate, but we also need to be good at communicating what our concerns are. But also, it is the responsibilities of governments as well, to create environments that are conducive to caring for children.
00:55:35		And we need to invest in those communities, those vulnerable communities where people are not well engaged in community

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		and not well engaged in school, and we need to put significant investment. That will benefit us in terms of mental health problems, illicit drug use, economic and educational attainment.
	LS	Now, we're bringing the webinar to a close in a moment.
00:55:59		But just before I do, I've just launched the poll again for everyone. We're really interested to see, having listened to the webinar, what you now think about who has the most significant role in terms of those different groups, government, schools, parents, peers. And so, while people are completing that poll, just to say thank you so much, Steve. There was so much in this webinar that was really, I think, fantastic information for those out there.
00:56:33		And for me, as well, I've really enjoyed it. Luckily we do have the recording. That will be available from our website for people to watch back or send on as well. One thing you've really highlighted is the importance of communication, not just between parents, schools, and young people, but also between parents. And so, if people are interested to send this webinar on to members in their community, that might be a really useful thing to do as well.
00:57:05		So, thank you so much, Steve. Now, we've got 80% of people have said that parents are the most significant influence. 14% said peers. Three percent said government. And three percent said schools. So, our audience really, really recognising the importance of parents, much more so than peers. So interesting. Would you have predicted that, Steve?
00:57:31	SA	Well, I would hope it, because I think we, as parents, have a very important role. The nature of the question makes us choose one thing and I suspect that most people agree that it's actually a combined approach that we need to take.
	LS	Well, thank you so much. Thank you, everyone who has joined us today for the webinar as well and for sending through your questions in advance and during the session.
00:58:00		And just to mention again that we do have a whole series of webinars available on demand for those that have taken place over 2017. And also, new webinars coming up in 2018. And we're always looking for your ideas about the topics that you would like to see presented here today. So, thank you, Steve, and good afternoon, or good morning, everyone. And goodbye. Thank you.

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00:58:29	SA	Goodbye.
00:58:43		