Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
Get informed, stay smart, stay safe

Are your teenager's friends influencing them to drink?

Introduction

As your child gets older, friendships with their peers become increasingly important. Indeed, the amount of time teenagers spend with their friends increases and friends play an important role in the development of your child's identity, self-worth, moral judgement, and social skills.

Friends can also play an important role when it comes to your child's drinking behaviour. Research shows that teenagers are more likely to become friends with peers whose alcohol use attitudes and behaviours are similar to their own. Friends can also influence teenagers to adjust their drinking behaviour to match that of their friends, with best friends having the greatest influence.

The average (mean) age at which teenagers start drinking alcohol is 16.2 years. The earlier they start drinking, the greater the risk of high levels of alcohol consumption and binge drinking later in secondary school. However, delaying alcohol initiation for as long as possible can reduce these risks and can also reduce the risk of problematic drinking later in life, as well as other alcohol-related harms, such as mental and physical health concerns.

It is therefore important that you encourage your child to develop friendships with peers who don't drink alcohol and are interested in delaying alcohol use for as long as possible. As a parent, you can help foster such positive and supportive friendships for you teenager. See below for some tips on how to do this, and ways your child can be a supportive friend when it comes to preventing alcohol and other drug use.

5 practical tips you can do as a parent

1. Be involved in your child's life

Regularly spend time with your teenager where you can give them your undivided attention. This might include:

- If they go out, ask them about where they are going and who they are going with and make this discussion a regular part of your conversations. Knowing who your teenager is with and where they are, can help reduce risk.
- Set up a routine of having meals together. This gives an opportunity to talk to your teenager and ask about their friends and school.
- Show an interest in their hobbies and activities. This helps open up conversation about the people your teenager may be hanging out with and the values and interest your child shares with their friends.

2. Know who your child's friends are

Following from point one, also try and get to know who your teenager's friends are. Peer influence can affect your teenager's behaviour, so it is natural to want to encourage your teenager to choose sensible friends and get to know them. Invite them to your house or talk to them if you pick your teenager up from school or after school activities.

3. Make contact with other parents

Get the contact details of your child's friends' parents so you can contact them if needed. Try to check in with the other parents in your teenager's year group and discuss what activities you're comfortable with and rules you think are appropriate when it comes to alcohol and other drug use.

4. Encourage your child to support their friends

When it comes to parties and other social gatherings, encourage your teenager to stay close to their friends, particularly when alcohol or other drugs are present. For example, your teenager could:

- Discourage friends from leaving the group with an unfamiliar person, suggesting instead the new person join the group.
- Keep an eye out for any friends who disappear from the group and make efforts to find and/or contact them.
- Arrange with friends to all go home together and remind each other to stick to this agreement. Set a meeting time and place to come back together if you separate from the group/get lost.

5. Equip your child with the skills to make their own choices.

As your teenager gets older, they'll likely be in situations where they may feel inclined or pressured to use alcohol or other drugs. There are a few options for how they can handle these situations.
See below for some options and suggest your child reads our short Making Choices factsheet for more tips and information.

- Option 1: Avoid situations where alcohol and other drugs will be present.
- Option 2: Give a reason e.g., "No thanks, my parents are picking me up soon".
- Option 3: Walk away.
- Option 4: Be assertive by keeping a clear firm voice and speaking clearly and deliberatively.
- Option 5: Be a 'broken record' e.g., repeatedly saying "no thanks".

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