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

Research recap: the impacts of drinking alcohol in front of your kids

The influence of parental drinking

It's estimated that 40% of Australian parents drink in front of their children at least weekly, with fathers more likely than mothers to do this. Parents' drinking, their attitude towards alcohol, and parents supplying alcohol, all play a role in their children's alcohol consumption and attitudes.A new study has provided insights into the ages that children and teenagers are most influenced by parents drinking in front of them. Using nationally representative Australian data collected across 23 years, the average drinking of mothers and fathers was mapped to 6,650 children.

The study found that the influence of parental drinking on their children's later drinking is strongest during middle adolescence, when children are aged 15-17. Influence then declines through the 20s but increases again at ages 28-37, particularly among people who have become parents themselves. The influence and relationship between parents and children were also found to be strongest between mother-to-daughter and father-to-son. Findings of the study also reinforced that drinking patterns established in early adulthood often persist into later life.

This new research further adds to the growing body of evidence demonstrating the key role parents play in influencing and informing young people's attitudes and behaviours towards alcohol.

Importance of delaying alcohol use for as long as possible among adolescents

Research has shown that the earlier a young person starts drinking the more likely they are to report hazardous drinking in young adulthood. Greater alcohol related harms and likelihood of developing an alcohol use disorder are also seen among people who start drinking alcohol before age 18. This reiterates the importance of delaying alcohol use among young people for as long as possible.

What can parents do?

Model responsible drinking

- Keep your own drinking in line with the Australian guidelines.
- These guidelines recommend no more than 4 standard drinks in one day, and no more than 10 in a week.
- The same guidelines also recommend people under the age of 18 should not drink alcohol at all. The brain continues to develop up until the age of 25, so young people are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of alcohol consumption.
- Limit drinking in front of children and adolescents, particularly among 15-17-year-olds.
- Avoid contradictions about what you tell them and what you do when it comes to drinking.

Avoid the normalisation of alcohol

- Avoid getting drunk, especially if children are around.
- Be mindful of how you talk about drinking, and try and demonstrate ways to have fun and cope that don't involve alcohol.
- Openly turn down offers of alcohol in front of your children.
- Read more about the unintended normalisation of alcohol during social celebrations in our factsheet.

Don't supply alcohol

- Some parents may think supplying alcohol can help teach “responsible” drinking or reduce risking drinking. Research evidence consistently contradicts this idea and shows **the best approach is to not supply any alcohol**.
- Research shows that supplying children with even small amounts of alcohol can increase their risk of drinking earlier, drinking more when they do drink, and experiencing problems with alcohol.
- Read more about parental supply of alcohol in our factsheet.

Be involved in your child’s life

- Communicate with your child about substance use early and often. Using a calm and non-judgmental approach helps when discussing alcohol and other drugs.
- Set clear rules around alcohol and have consistent and calm conversations about these expectations. Explain why these rules and expectations are important. For example, talk about how alcohol can affect teen brain development.
- Foster strong connection with your child by learning about and joining them in their interests and activities. Research shows that children who feel connected to their parents are more likely to listen to their guidance.
- Get to know your child’s friends and their parents. Invite them to your house, or talk to them if you pick your child up from school or after school activities. Learn more about how being involved in your child’s life can help them stay safe.

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