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

Factsheet

How parents can protect against drug and alcohol use and related harms

Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our Help/Q&A section for more details.

Year:

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol, Drugs (General)

Tags:

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

What can parents do?

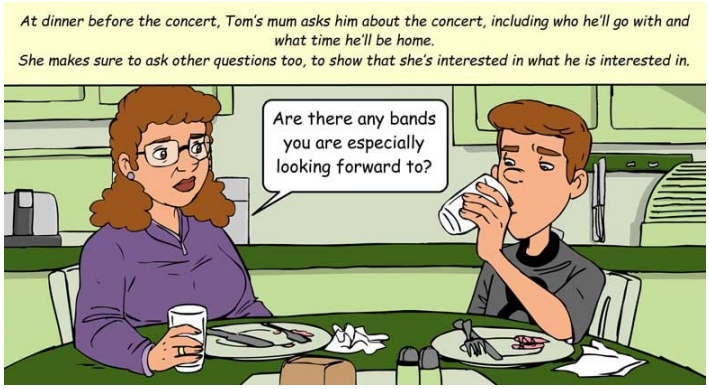
As a parent or guardian, you have a big impact on a teenager's life and the decisions they make. Research has shown there are many ways in which parents can minimise the chances that a teenager will use drugs and alcohol, or experience harms from their use.

1. Be a good role model

- Your attitude matters! Young people whose parents show they approve of underage drinking are more likely to misuse alcohol. Your own use of alcohol, cigarettes and drugs matters, as young people often model their parent's behaviour.
- Avoid contradictions between what you tell them and what you do, and try to demonstrate ways to have fun and deal with problems that don't involve drugs or alcohol.

2. Be involved in their lives

- Regularly spend time with your teenager where you can give them your undivided attention.
- Set up a routine of having meals together or helping them with their homework.
- Get involved and show an interest in their hobbies and activities.
- 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 conversation. Knowing who your teenager is with and where they are, can help reduce risk.
- Peer influence can affect your teenager's behaviour, so it is natural to want to help your teenager choose the right friends and to 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.
- Get to know their parents as well, as they can provide a support network to look out for the safety of your teenager.



3. Set rules and expectations

- Set rules and expectations around drug and alcohol use with your teenager. Discuss these rules together including the consequences for breaking them.
- Don't supply alcohol to your teenager. A common misperception is that giving alcohol to young people helps them to develop healthy drinking habits. Research shows that supplying alcohol to young people under the age of 18 can increase their risk of drinking earlier, drinking more when they do drink and experiencing problems with alcohol.

4. Make time for your teenager

- Let your teenager know that you are always ready and willing to talk and listen.
- When talking to them try not to lecture them; it is important to listen to their thoughts and concerns and offer help and support.
- Try and make yourself available most of the time. For example, make sure your teenager can contact you easily if they are at a party.

See also:

Talking to a young person about alcohol and other drugs

How to help someone who has taken a drug

Parenting guidelines for adolescent alcohol use

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University. SeeParent booklet for more information.

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