



Factsheet 

Should I give my teenager alcohol?



Evidence ratings: 

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

Year: Year 7-8, Year 9-10, Year 11-12

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol

Tags: supply, minor, parties, law

Origin: Australian

Cost:

Free

Key messages

- Parents have a major influence on their teenager's drinking and can help prevent alcohol misuse.
- Parents often receive inconsistent messages about what they should do to prevent alcohol use among teenagers, especially as to whether or not they should supply alcohol to their children.
- It is important to know the law on parental supply to your own children and their friends.

Supplying alcohol to teenagers

Teenagers who drink most commonly receive their alcohol from parents. Some parents supply alcohol to their teens in the hope that it will reduce risky drinking. However, research shows that the **opposite is true**. A recent study found that teenagers whose parents make alcohol accessible or allow them to drink at home were more likely to:

- Start drinking and/or have alcohol-related problems earlier
- Drink more frequently, at higher quantities, and/or
- Have more alcohol related problems in life.

Myths surrounding parental supply of alcohol

There are a number of beliefs about the parental supply of alcohol that research now suggests are not accurate. These are reviewed below.

Myth 1: "My child will drink alcohol no matter what, and will probably binge drink."

Some parents believe it is okay to supply their children with alcohol because they think that it is inevitable that their child will drink alcohol and they want to prevent binge drinking.

Parents may have this belief because adolescents themselves overestimate how many of their peers drink, or because binge drinking was once much more prevalent than it is today.

In reality, there has been a major generational shift in alcohol consumption, and adolescents are drinking less, with more adolescents abstaining from drinking altogether. Almost half (41%) of 12-15-year-old Australians have never drunk alcohol in their lifetime.

Myth 2: "If I let my child have a few drinks in a safe environment at home, they won't drink to excess when they are out with friends."

In fact, research shows that experimenting with alcohol at home is associated with an *increased* level of drinking outside of the home in the near future. This is even if the adolescent is supervised by a parent when drinking at home.

Parental attitudes about alcohol have a major influence on adolescent drinking. Supplying alcohol to your adolescent is one way of implicitly giving your approval for them to drink, and potentially misuse, alcohol.

Additionally, it is important to remember that even small amounts of alcohol (even a sip) can be harmful to adolescents.

Myth 3: "If I give my child alcohol to take to a party, I can limit how much they will drink."

Giving adolescents a fixed number of drinks to take to a party does not limit how much adolescents drink. Almost half of adolescents who receive alcohol from their parents to take to social events add to this by getting alcohol from other sources.

Giving your child alcohol to take to a party shows your teen you approve of their drinking.

Additionally, even small amounts of alcohol can be harmful to adolescents.

Myth 4: "A sip, or half a glass of wine will teach responsible drinking."

Some Australian parents endorse the "Mediterranean model" of introducing small amounts of alcohol to teens to teach responsible drinking. It is important to note that alcohol socialisation differs across cultures, and, in the context of Australian culture, researchers and experts recommend against early supply of alcohol.

Importantly, parents can teach responsible drinking without their child actually drinking. One way is modelling responsible drinking.

What does the law say about parents supplying alcohol to teenagers?

Click on your State or Territory below to find out the law regarding the supply of alcohol to teenagers.

NSW

In NSW, it is illegal to supply alcohol to someone under the age of 18 unless:

1. You are the parent or guardian of that young person, or
2. You are authorised by that young person's parent or guardian to supply alcohol; and
3. You are in a private setting (e.g. family home) and
4. The young person is supervised responsibly

It is important to note that the law does not consider supervision to be 'responsible' if the young person is intoxicated or if the parent or guardian or authorised person is intoxicated themselves.

Maximum Penalty

Significant fines apply. A \$1,100 on-the-spot can be issued, or the courts can impose fines of up \$11,000 and/or 12 months imprisonment.

For more information, please click visit the NSW Police Website [here](#).

ACT

In the ACT, it is illegal to supply alcohol to someone under the age of 18 unless:

1. You are the parent or guardian of that young person, or
2. You are authorised by that young person's parent or guardian to supply alcohol; and
3. You are in a private setting (e.g. family home) and
4. The young person is supervised responsibly

It is important to note that the law does not consider supervision to be 'responsible' if the young person is intoxicated or if the parent or guardian or authorised person is intoxicated themselves.

Maximum Penalty

\$3200.

For more information, please visit the ACT Policing website [here](#).

NT

In the NT, it is illegal to supply alcohol to someone under the age of 18 unless:

1. You are the parent or guardian of that young person, or
2. You are an adult who has the parental rights and responsibilities of the young person,
3. You are in a private setting (e.g. family home) and

4. The young person is supervised responsibly

It is important to note that the law does not consider supervision to be 'responsible' if the young person is intoxicated or if the parent or guardian or authorised person is intoxicated themselves.

Maximum Penalty

Offenders are liable for a fine of up to \$13,300.

For more information please visit the Northern Territory Government page [here](#).

QLD

In the QLD, it is illegal to supply alcohol to someone under the age of 18 unless:

1. You are the parent or guardian of that young person, or
2. You are an adult who has the parental rights and responsibilities of the young person,
3. You are in a private setting (e.g. family home) and
4. The young person is supervised responsibly

It is important to note that the law does not consider supervision to be 'responsible' if the young person is intoxicated or if the parent or guardian or authorised person is intoxicated themselves.

Maximum Penalty

You could face court and be fined up to \$13,352 for supplying alcohol to a person under 18 years old while at a private place, if you are not their responsible adult and providing responsible supervision.

For more information please visit the Queensland Government website [here](#).

SA

At a party in a private house, it is not an offence to supply children with alcohol, as long as:

1. You are the parent or guardian of that young person, or
2. You are authorised by that young person's parent or guardian to supply alcohol; and
3. You are in a private setting (e.g. family home) and
4. The young person is supervised responsibly

It is important to note that the law does not consider supervision to be 'responsible' if the young person is intoxicated or if the parent or guardian or authorised person is intoxicated themselves.

For more information, please visit the Government of South Australia website [here](#).

TAS

It is illegal to supply alcohol to someone under the age of 18 unless:

1. You are the parent or guardian of that young person, or
2. You are authorised by that young person's parent or guardian to supply alcohol; and
3. You are in a private setting (e.g. family home) and
4. The young person is supervised responsibly

It is important to note that the law does not consider supervision to be 'responsible' if the young person is intoxicated or if the parent or guardian or authorised person is intoxicated themselves.

Maximum Penalty

Fines for minor offences may be imposed by infringement notice. Significant fines or a jail term of up to 12 months may be incurred for more serious offences.

For more information please visit the Tasmanian Police website [here](#).

VIC

It is illegal to supply alcohol to people aged under 18 years in a private home unless parental consent has been given, and drinking is supervised by a responsible adult.

Maximum Penalty

A person who supplies alcohol to a minor without a parent's consent could be fined more than \$24,000.

For more information please visit the Victorian Government website [here](#).

WA

It is an offence for a person to supply liquor to a juvenile without the consent of the juvenile's parent or guardian.

Maximum Penalty

\$10,000.

For more information please visit the Government of Western Australia website [here](#).

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers from Climate Schools Plus at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney.

