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

Factsheet

Should I give my teenager alcohol? The evidence says no



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 use and related harms.
- Parents often receive inconsistent messages about what they should do to prevent harm from alcohol among teenagers, and whether they should allow them to drink alcohol.
- The safest option is to not supply alcohol. Research shows that supplying teenagers with even small amounts of alcohol can increase their risk of drinking earlier, drinking more when they do drink, and experiencing problems with alcohol.

Supplying alcohol to teenagers

Parents are one of the main suppliers of alcohol for teenagers. Some parents give alcohol to their teens in the hope that it will reduce risky drinking. However, research consistently shows that the **opposite is true**.

Long term studies from both Australia and overseas have found that teenagers whose parents make alcohol accessible or allow them to drink at home were more likely to:

- Start drinking earlier
- Drink more frequently, at higher quantities (binge drink)
- Experience alcohol-related harms compared to teens who aren't supplied alcohol by their parents.

For example, a large, long term Australian study found that teens whose parents gave them a full standard drink had 5.5 times the odds of binge drinking, and 3.5 times the odds of experiencing alcohol-related harms, compared to teens who weren't supplied full drinks.

Even giving sips of alcohol is associated with increased risk of harms compared to not supplying alcohol. The risks increase the younger someone is when they are first supplied with alcohol. Teenagers who are given alcohol by their parents are also more likely to receive alcohol from other sources (e.g. friends or siblings) later on.

The safest option is to not supply alcohol.

What do the guidelines say?

The '*Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*' by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) are aimed at reducing health risks arising from alcohol consumption. **The guidelines recommend that children, and people under 18 years of age, should not drink alcohol.** This is important because the brain undergoes significant development in adolescence, and in fact continues to develop up until the age of 25. Young people are therefore particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of alcohol consumption and should delay alcohol use for as long as possible. Read more about Australia's alcohol guidelines here.

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 it is inevitable that their child will drink.

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. In 2022-23 almost half (41%) of 12-15-year-old Australians had never drunk alcohol, compared to only 18% never drinking in 2005.

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 supply of alcohol by parents at home is associated with increased supply from other sources (e.g. friends, siblings) later on.

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 can be harmful to the developing adolescent brain.

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 try and teach responsible drinking. It is important to note that alcohol socialisation differs across cultures, and, in the context of Australian culture, researchers and experts recommendagainst early supply of alcohol.

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

Video: Should I let my teenager drink alcohol?

What can parents do to help teenagers stay safe?

The good news is that there are things parents can do to help their teenagers stay safe. Positive Choices has lots of evidence-based factsheets, videos, and webinars with practical guidance to help.

Getting the facts about alcohol



A great first step is gathering information about alcohol, to help address any questions or misconceptions teenagers might have. Some things to look into are the effects of alcohol, how many teenagers have used alcohol, and what the law says about alcohol use. Think of questions they may ask and how to answer them.

- Alcohol: factsheet
- Is there a healthy amount of alcohol?
- Why do young people use drugs and alcohol?
- Drug and alcohol use and the law

Talking about alcohol



Talking about alcohol can be challenging, but it's important to have open conversations so teens are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to make safe and informed choices. Be prepared to correct myths about alcohol use and outline rules and expectations about alcohol use.

- Talking to a young person about alcohol and other drugs
- Harm minimisation: How to talk to teenagers about staying safe
- Making the link: How to approach conversations with your teenagers (video)
- Parents & teenagers talk about alcohol use (video)
- How to talk with teenagers about alcohol use (webinar)
- Parenting, teens, and alcohol (webinar)

Role modelling



Role modelling lower-risk drinking and alcohol-free choices can help delay teenager's drinking. It can also positively influence their attitudes and behaviours around alcohol. Demonstrate that social events can be fun without alcohol and try to model healthy strategies to cope with stress that don't involve alcohol.

- Normalising alcohol during social celebrations: what role does the family play?

Parties and Schools/Leavers' week



Be prepared for situations where teenagers are more likely to encounter alcohol, such as parties. Whether hosting a party or attending one elsewhere, it's helpful to talk openly about the situations they may face and give options to help prevent or reduce risky behaviour.

- Hosting a teenage party
- Making sure your child stays safe at parties
- Schoolies/Leavers' week: what parents can do to keep their teenager safe
- Harm minimisation: how to talk to teenagers about staying safe
- Parties, gatherings, and sleepovers: how can parents keep their teens safe? (webinar)

Communicating with other parents about alcohol



Talking to other parents and getting on the same page about expectations and rules around alcohol can help. Discuss whether teens have permission to drink, have access to alcohol, and how they are supervised.

- Hosting a teenage party
- Making sure your child stays safe at parties

What to do when concerned about a teenager's alcohol use



Starting the conversation about a teenager's potential alcohol use can be tricky. Having that initial conversation may not resolve everything, but it can be an important first step.

- Starting the conversation when you are concerned about drug and alcohol use
- What are the warning signs of a dependence on drugs?
- Supporting a young person's mental health
- Where to get help
- Anxiety and drinking: how to support anxious teens and prevent the anxiety-alcohol cycle (webinar)

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

Please note that this information is a general summary and should not be taken as comprehensive legal advice.

In the ACT, NSW, SA, TAS, VIC, and WA, it is illegal to supply alcohol to someone under the age of 18 unless:

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

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

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

Penalties differ across states and territories and may include on-the-spot fines and imprisonment. For more information about the law in your state or territory, see the below links:

- Australian Capital Territory
- New South Wales
- Northern Territory
- Queensland
- South Australia
- Tasmania
- Victoria
- Western Australia

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers from the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney. A list of sources that also informed this factsheet is provided below.

Sources

1. Aiken, A., et al., *Trajectories of parental and peer supply of alcohol in adolescence and associations with later alcohol consumption and harms: A prospective cohort study.* Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 2022. **237**: p. 109533.
2. Scully, M., et al., *ASSAD 2022–2023: Australian secondary school students' use of alcohol and other substances*. 2023, Cancer Council Victoria.
3. Aiken, A., et al., *Parental supply of sips and whole drinks of alcohol to adolescents and associations with binge drinking and alcohol-related harms: A prospective cohort study.* Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 2020. **215**: p. 108204.
4. Mattick, R.P., et al., *Association of parental supply of alcohol with adolescent drinking, alcohol-related harms, and alcohol use disorder symptoms: a prospective cohort study.* Lancet Public Health, 2018. **3**(2): p. e64-e71.
5. Clare, P.J., et al., *The overall effect of parental supply of alcohol across adolescence on alcohol-related harms in early adulthood—a prospective cohort study.* Addiction, 2020. **115**(10): p. 1833-1843.
6. Boland, V.C., et al., *The association between parental supply of alcohol and supply from other sources to young people: a prospective cohort.*Addiction, 2020. **115**(11): p. 2140-2147.
7. Livingston, M., et al. *Alcohol consumption trends in Australia: Comparing surveys and sales-based measures*. in *Drug and Alcohol Review*. 2018.
8. Lam, T., et al., *Parental alcohol supply at school leavers' celebrations and other peer-based social events.*Journal of Substance Use, 2017. **22**(5): p. 516-523.
9. Yap, M.B.H., et al., *Modifiable parenting factors associated with adolescent alcohol misuse: a systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies.*Addiction, 2017. **112**(7): p. 1142-1162.
10. Ryan, S.M., et al., *Parenting strategies for reducing adolescent alcohol use: a Delphi consensus study.*BMC Public Health, 2011. **11**: p. 13.
11. Sharmin, S., et al., *Parent hazardous drinking and their children's alcohol use in early and mid-adolescence: prospective cohort study.*European Journal of Public Health, 2019. **29**(4): p. 736-740.

© 2026 Positive Choices | Built by Netfront