

Teen Drinking

By Professor Matt Sanders



Teenage drinking is common. More than three quarters of 12-year-olds and 90% of 14-year-olds report that they have already had a drink of alcohol. About one in five teenagers aged between 13 and 17 report regularly having more than five drinks in a row.

So why do teenagers drink?

For a start, alcohol is generally regarded as a socially acceptable drug and many teens see their parents and other adults drinking at home and at social functions. Alcohol is usually only considered to be a problem when used in excess or over a long period of time. Although there are advertising campaigns on the dangers of teen drinking there are many advertising campaigns promoting alcohol companies and distributors. For some teens, drinking may help them relax and feel more at ease, especially when they're with their friends. And of course parties may encourage drinking alcohol to excess, with some teens gaining powerful approval and attention from friends.

The main risks for teens are in situations when they drink more than their bodies can handle. Teaching teens how to use alcohol responsibly is seen increasingly as more useful than trying to stop them drinking at all. However, this can be a problem because, after drinking a certain amount of alcohol, it becomes more difficult for teenagers to make good decisions. And there are laws against drinking alcohol under the age of 18.

It's advisable to educate your teen about the risks of alcohol. Get information about the effects of alcohol on the body and what a standard drink is. Explain how much alcohol can be drunk to keep a blood alcohol concentration below .05 and that blood alcohol concentration varies from person to person. And remind them of the law against underage drinking.

Talk to your teen about how to cope with the pressure from friends to drink, especially at parties. They need to have a plan that allows them to avoid peer pressure to drink, but that doesn't result in being rejected by their friends.

Help them come up with some suggestions. They could talk about being on a health kick or wanting to start training soon for a sport or activity that drinking alcohol would affect. They could say they can't afford to buy alcohol and don't want to keep borrowing from friends, or that they are saving for a trip or some other item or event. Or they could say that it's affecting their relationship with the opposite sex. You could then try practicing this in a role play with your teenager. You take the role of the

friend trying to pressure them to drink and get your teen to practice what they're going to say. Make it as realistic as possible and have the conversation you think might happen. Praise them for the bits they do convincingly and, if necessary, swap roles to show what they could say and then get them to try it again. In this way you should be able to improve your teenager's skill in using their plan when needed.

Later, after your teenager has been in a situation when they might have been asked to drink a lot, ask them how they went. Praise their attempts to resist peer pressure and revise the plan if it didn't go as expected. Come up with another plan if needed but keep working together to help them resist peer pressure to drink too much.

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More Triple P information is available for parents of children of all ages living in Brighton and Hove. For more information about Triple P visit the web at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/parentingteam or call the Parenting Team on 01273 294471

