



a parents' guide to

TEENAGE alcohol & parties



Tyson Stelzer

everyone loves parties.

For young people, parties are an important part of growing up. But teenage fun can quickly turn ugly when alcohol enters the scene.

Teenage alcohol consumption in Australia has sky rocketed in recent times, with the latest survey showing that most teenagers are downing their first alcoholic drink at age eleven.

ABC TV, 2005

When Australian teenagers consume alcohol, four times out of five they do so at high risk levels.

In South-East Queensland today, children as young as grade six deceive their parents and turn up to large uncontrolled drinking parties in public places.

Alcohol is the most socially accepted drug in Australia, and the most commonly used drug among teenagers. Under-age drinking must be actively discouraged.

This guide presents the practical steps that you can take to minimise the risks for your teenager.

model good behaviour

As a parent, you play a critical role in influencing your teenager's use of alcohol. You carry the primary responsibility in discouraging early and excessive use.

The single most important thing that you can do is to model safe drinking behaviour.

There is nothing that you can do or say that will have a stronger impact on your teenager's attitude toward alcohol than the example which you set in where, how and why you use alcohol. Be a positive influence.

Respondents who drank with their parents were... about one-third as likely to binge drink. It appears that parents who model responsible drinking behaviours have the potential to teach their children the same... Once something is not taboo in a household it reduces the likelihood that it will be abused.

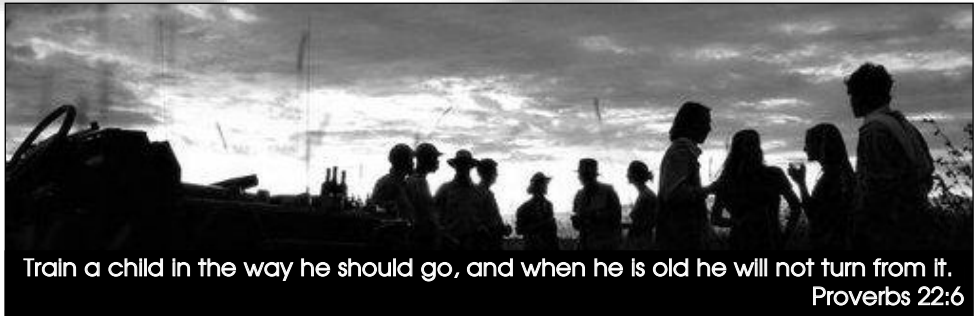
US study, 2004

communicate

Open up the communication channels with your teenager. Listen to what they have to say about alcohol. Hear out their opinions, questions, emotions and concerns. Find out what the issues are for them. Take an interest in where they're going and what they're doing.

Ask them what they understand the dangers to be, and have them propose their own strategies for avoiding the risks. This is a good way to open up discussion without coming down forcefully.

Listen first, then speak. Share your thoughts on alcohol and gently explain your feelings



Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.
Proverbs 22:6

and concerns. It is important that you let him or her know you do not approve of alcohol use because it is dangerous. Be firm, but non-judgmental. Back up what you're saying by explaining the negative effects of alcohol.

Be actively involved in your teenager's life. Get to know their friends. Keep up with what's going on for them. You can be interested in their life and still respect their privacy. **A good relationship with your teenager will determine how effective you are at influencing their use of alcohol.**

Research shows that teenagers are much more likely to delay drinking when they feel they have a close, supportive tie with a parent or guardian. The longer young people delay alcohol use, the less likely they are to develop any problems associated with it.



start young

Friends and "fitting in" are high priorities for adolescents. They tend to look to their friends and to the media for how to behave, often questioning boundaries laid down by their parents. This can be a challenging time to establish appropriate limits regarding alcohol use.

Experts agree that we should be talking to our kids at early primary school age.

-By the time children are between eight and ten, they've already formed fairly clear views on alcohol. If you leave it until they're fourteen, it might be too late.

Discussions about alcohol in Australian households are common. Keep the dialogue going in your home.

negotiate the boundaries

Not only do teenagers who have clearly prescribed parameters regarding their drinking respond well to these guidelines, but those without this guidance can often desire that type of direction.

Australian Government
Research Report, 2005.

Establishing and enforcing limits on teenagers is not easy. However, they are likely to drink less if their parents have established clear boundaries.

These should be discussed with them before anything happens. **Agree on boundaries for what is acceptable and stick to these.** Make the limits clear and specific. For a young teenager (12-14), set the rules and outline the consequences of breaking them. With older teenagers (15-17), negotiate an agreement about what is acceptable behaviour.

Negotiate appropriate rewards for compliance and consequences if they step outside the established guidelines. For instance, a teenager who sticks to the boundaries might be rewarded with additional independence or responsibility in some way. *Make sure you follow through consistently.*

Decide on common sense limits that you are comfortable with. For instance:

- Teenagers will not drink alcohol until they are eighteen
- Teenagers over sixteen may only drink at home if a parent is also home
- Teenagers will not attend or stay at teen parties where alcohol is served
- Teenagers will not get into a car with a driver who has been drinking

Due to the effects of alcohol on the developing brain, teenagers under sixteen years of age should avoid alcohol. There is no safe level of alcohol use at this young age.

how to host a safe party

Helping your teenager plan for a party can be an enjoyable experience for you both. **Create a night that your guests will remember for all the right reasons.** No one wants drunken behaviour, property damage, personal injury or gatecrashers. Here are some tips for hosting a safe party.

responsibility

Explain to your teenager that as the parent you are legally responsible for the safety and well being of young people in your home. You have a duty of care, and there may be legal consequences if this is breached.

avoiding gate crashers

Gatecrashers are becoming more common at teenage parties. Here are some tips for avoiding them:

- Issue personal invitations in writing only, **never via email, Internet chat forums or sms text messages**, which might be forwarded and distributed without your permission or knowledge. Avoid open-house parties.
- Obtain RSVPs, compile a list of attendees and allow entrance by invitation only. *No invite, no entry!*
- Provide only one entry and exit point and supervise access to your home.
- Refuse uninvited guests or those bringing in alcohol. It's your party and you have the right to ask people to leave. Phone the local police station if things start to get out of hand, or 000 if the station is not attended.

maintain a presence

- Supervision of teenager parties by responsible adults is essential. At least one parent must be present for the duration of the function.
- Ask another couple, a parent or friend for support. For large parties, arrange a number of adults to be present.
- As a parent, frequently bring in snacks and non-alcoholic beverages. Your visibility will help keep the party running smoothly, and with arm loads of goodies, the young people will be delighted to see you!
- As a host, you have the right to set the standard of acceptable behaviour and ensure that it is maintained at your party.

numbers and timing

- Keep numbers manageable (10-15 teenagers per adult).
- State the precise start and finish times on the invitation.

communicate with parents

- Communicate with the parents of the teenagers invited.
- Talk to other parents about their experiences with teenage parties. They are often feeling the same as you.



- If informing parents is difficult, try sending the invitations directly to the parents, get your teenagers to organise the parents to contact you, or write separate parent letters to inform them.



negotiate the ground rules

- Discuss the ground rules with your teenager before the party is announced, to ensure that everyone has a safe and enjoyable time. This gives you both an opportunity to express feelings and concerns, allows you to outline your expectations and helps him or her to understand your philosophy of alcohol-free parties.
- Be prepared to negotiate if your teenager reacts negatively to your proposal. For instance, restrict your presence in the party area in exchange for your teenager's agreement to have an alcohol-free party, or allow up to 30 guests if your teenager agrees to make up formal written invitations.

alcohol

- Australian teenagers are likely to drink at high risk levels when at a friend's house or at a party, even while supervised. For this reason, ***it is strongly recommended that no alcohol be served to people under the age of eighteen.***
- If you do serve alcohol to underage drinkers and an accident occurs, you may be found criminally and/or civilly liable in a court of law.
- State on the invitation that no alcohol is permitted.
- If you discover drinking at your party, be prepared to tackle this. Ask to mind the alcohol while they are in your home. You have a right to confiscate alcohol if you need to. You need to work out what you will do when the guest leaves (you could be held liable if you return alcohol to a young person who then consumes it after leaving and gets into trouble).

provide alternatives to alcohol

Have plenty of food and non-alcoholic drinks available (like water, non-alcoholic punch, mocktails, fruit juice and soft drinks).

register your party

Register your party with the local police at least one week beforehand, using the Party Safe Registration Form. This provides the police with the details that they need to know in case they are called to your party to deal with an incident. Download the form at http://www.police.qld.gov.au/pr/program/partySafe/pdf/PartySafe_RegistrationForm.pdf.

useful resources

Use the "Guide to Throwing a Great Party where Everyone Stays in Control" with your teenager. It outlines the effects of alcohol and how to plan a safe party and includes cool recipes for mocktails and party eats. Check it out at <http://www.dao.health.wa.gov.au/pdf/factsheets/alcohol/HP6183.pdf>.

For a checklist for hosting a party, see www.adf.org.au/download.asp?RelatedLinkId=255.

hosting over-18 parties

your responsibility

- It is legal for you to supply alcohol in your home to teenagers since it is on private premises. However, it is your responsibility as a host to ensure the safety of your guests. You may be legally liable and could be charged with civil negligence if a drunken guest causes damage to property or another person.
- Teenagers should not be allowed to take alcohol from the party to drink somewhere else. If this is happening you could be held liable.
- Make it clear to parents beforehand if you intend to allow alcohol at a party.
- Consider hiring a private security guard for your party if you anticipate trouble.

control the flow

- Don't allow BYO. You can control the amount and type of alcohol served if you are managing it yourself. Even still, teens are likely to want to binge drink when alcohol is provided at a party. Use the following strategies to manage this.
- *Maintain a presence.* Adult supervision plays a critical role in reducing excessive drinking among Australian teenagers. However, it does not generally prevent higher risk drinking altogether.
- Establish an agreement between yourself and your teenager about alcohol and adult supervision.
- Appoint a responsible adult to serve the alcohol, and have them take special care to control how much alcohol is consumed.
- Don't top up drinks.
- Pre-mix drinks to ensure limited and controlled alcohol content. Serve only low-alcohol drinks.
- Always supply alternatives to alcohol. Serve non-carbonated drinks (juices and water) as "spacers." Avoid serving too many salt foods, as these make people thirsty and encourage them to drink more. Plan activities and games that take the focus off drinking.



control the flow

attending a party

As a parent, it is your responsibility to ensure your child's safety. You can let your teenager go to parties with peace of mind, but you need to do your homework first.

be informed

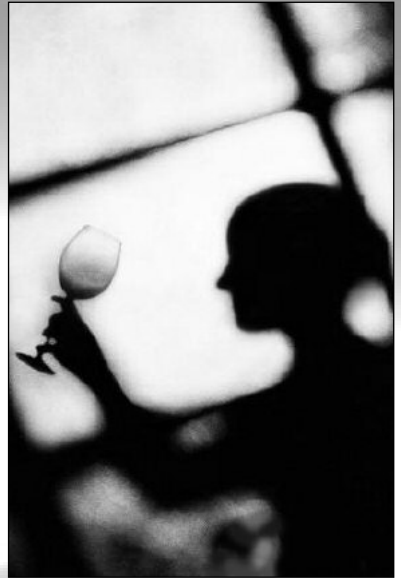
Ask questions. Communicate with your son or daughter and with the host parents to confirm:

- Address of the party
- That parents will be present at all times
- Precise start and finish times
- That alcohol will not be served at under-eighteen parties
- Contact phone numbers

Call the host parents to confirm the details. You might even offer assistance at the same time.

keep in touch

Ensure that your teenager can contact you in the event that the details change, the party gets out of control or they begin to feel unsafe for any reason. Tell them that they can contact you at any time without question.



transport

- Personally transport your son or daughter to and from the venue. Negotiate the pick-up time.
- Go to the door when you drop them off and pick them up. This is important so as to confirm that all is well.
- If you are transporting your teenager's friends, first confirm that they are invited to the party.

negotiate the ground rules

Check with your teenager that you are both clear about what is acceptable behaviour, and the consequences if the rules are broken. Discuss any concerns and negotiate the conditions.

Your teenager might feel that you do not trust him or her. Explain that you are concerned about their safety.

useful resources

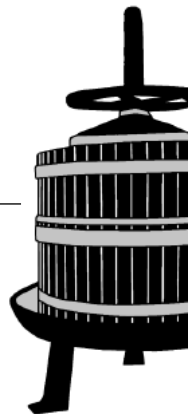
Check out the "Parent / young person safe partying agreement" at www.adf.org.au/download.asp?RelatedLinkID=258



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