Teenagers and alcohol: How much influence do parents really have?

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Does any parent really want their teen to drink?

Most probably not ... however ...

- small minority simply don't care – abusive in their response
- there are certainly cultural issues to consider – drinking small amounts in a family context is a 'tradition'
- some desperately want to be their child's friend and are frightened of saying 'no'
- "we all did it ... there's nothing wrong with us!"
- others may want to relive their adolescence by drinking with their teens or 'becoming one of the gang'
- it's just too hard and whatever they do, it won't make a difference

What does the evidence say – can you make a difference?
Outline of presentation

- setting the scene – how many Australians drink alcohol and are we drinking differently than in the past?
- what about young people?
- why shouldn't young people be drinking?
- what influence can a parent have in preventing early drinking?
- what are the barriers to parental influence?
- what about teenage parties and gatherings?
Alcohol

What is happening in Australia? Are we drinking more than in the past?
Apparent consumption of pure alcohol, beverage type as a proportion of all alcohol, 1962-2012

ABS 2013

What Australians are drinking has changed substantially since the early 60s. Beer consumption has decreased dramatically, while wine and spirits account for a much greater proportion of all alcohol consumed.

DARTA
Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
Apparent consumption of pure alcohol, per capita, 1962-2012

ABS 2013

Apparent consumption of pure alcohol per capita has fluctuated over the past 50 years, hitting a peak in the late 70s. We're drinking less but our drinking patterns have changed.
So what is happening?

Unfortunately it is how we drink when we do that appears to be the problem – when we drink, we drink a lot (usually quickly, over a short period of time) – we are a nation of binge drinkers.

When we drink less, alcohol companies profits drop – aggressive marketing and great resistance to restrictions on advertising and sponsorship regulations.
Alcohol

How about school-based young people? Is it getting worse?
Never consumed alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), 2011

2011 ASSAD Survey

The majority of young people across all age groups have tried alcohol, with use increasing as they get older. That said, it is important to remember that almost one in five Year 10 students have never consumed alcohol.
Australian secondary school students who describe themselves as non-drinkers (%), 2011

2011 ASSAD Survey

Even though many of them have tried alcohol, the vast majority of them still regard themselves as 'non-drinkers' until they reach 16 years of age.
The proportion of 12-15 year old 'current drinkers' continues to decrease. Less young people are drinking and the number who report drinking more than four drinks on a single occasion in the past week has also dropped since a peak in 2002 (7% down to 3%)
The proportion of 16-17 year old 'current drinkers' has also decreased. Once again, less young people are drinking and the number who report drinking more than four drinks on a single occasion in the past week has also dropped since a peak in 1999 (24% down to 16%).
Respondents were classified as 'non-drinkers' (never had a glass of alcohol), 'moderate drinkers' (had a full glass but not more than four drinks on a single occasion in the last month) or 'risky drinkers' (had more than four drinks on one or more occasions in the last month). Although there are more small numbers of 'risky drinkers' in Years 8 and 9, it is Year 10 where things begin to change.
Average number of drinks consumed by current drinkers in past seven days, by age and gender, 2011

2011 ASSAD Survey

Unfortunately 'current drinkers' consumed a lot of alcohol. Across all ages, average drinking levels reported exceeded recommended levels for adults.
So what does this mean?

Many young people consider themselves 'non-drinkers'

Number of 'current drinkers' is actually decreasing - however, a small, but consistent number of these are putting themselves at great risk

- they're drinking a lot, doing it regularly
- likely to be spirit drinkers
- Yr 10 appears to be the year where drinking patterns change – much smaller numbers in Yr 9 and below ...
Why shouldn't young people be drinking?

Growing evidence that we should be delaying alcohol use for as long as possible – key concerns ...

- the developing brain
- increased risk of liver disease
- increased cancer risk, particularly breast cancer in young women
- the earlier you drink, the greater risk of future alcohol problems, including dependency
  - more likely to be sexually active at earlier ages, to have sexual intercourse more often, and to have unprotected sex
  - more likely to be victims of violent crime, including rape, aggravated assault, and robbery
Alcohol

What is the impact on the developing brain?

FACT: Alcohol interferes with the growing brain... well into your 20's.

www.springfieldprevention.org
Alcohol and the developing brain

Alcohol damages two areas of the brain that undergo major changes in adolescence

- The hippocampus deals with memory and learning - suffers the worst damage. Those who drink more and for longer have significantly smaller hippocampi (up to 10% smaller).
- The prefrontal area undergoes most change during adolescence - teen drinking could cause severe changes, affecting the formation of adult personality and behaviour.

If a young person is going to drink alcohol at this time - make sure it is a small amount and that they do not drink regularly. However, the evidence clearly indicates that they should not drink at all.
Alcohol and the developing brain

These brain scans show the possible impact that alcohol can have on the adolescent brain

- the first shows a 15 year-old non-drinker - the pink and orange indicates healthy activity, particularly in the prefrontal area and the hippocampus

- the bottom one shows a 15 year-old heavy drinker - an unhealthy brain with little or no activity in the key areas
Alcohol and the developing liver
NDRI, 2011

The risk of young people being admitted to hospital with alcohol-related liver disease has risen more than tenfold over five years

“The most worrying increase in alcoholic cirrhosis ... Occurred in those aged 20 to 29, who would have begun drinking in their early teens.”

Professor Chikritzhs said better screening techniques for liver disease did not explain such a marked increase ...

“Although people might be drinking the same volume of alcohol, there has been an increase in the consumption of products such as wine which have a higher alcohol content, with beer containing an average of 4% and red wine an average of 14%”
Alcohol causes cancer in more places than you think.

Alcohol and cancer

What is the risk?
## Alcohol and cancer risk

Cancer Council Australia (2013)

Estimated incidence of cancers caused by alcohol use in Australia, applying population attributable fractions for the UK to Australian cancer incidence data for 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cancer site</th>
<th>Population attributable fraction %</th>
<th>Incidence 2009</th>
<th>Incidence attributable to alcohol use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mouth, pharynx, larynx</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3,005</td>
<td>508 - 1,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oesophagus in men</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>8 - 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oesophagus in women</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>232 - 468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowel in men</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7,982</td>
<td>559 - 1,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast in women</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13,668</td>
<td>683 – 3,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver in men</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>936</td>
<td>107 -309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver in women</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>18 - 66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Alcoholic drinks are carcinogenic to humans. There is no evidence that there is a safe threshold of alcohol consumption for avoiding cancer, or that cancer risk varies between the type of alcoholic beverage consumed"

(Cancer Council Australia, 2013)
Can parents make a difference?

There are a number of areas that parents have a major impact ...

- **promote positive norms** – the majority of 15 yr olds classify themselves as non-drinkers
- **challenge misconceptions** – 'not everyone does it', alcohol is a drug and it is possible to celebrate without it ...
- **don't support teen drinking** – make your values absolutely clear and your reasons for this stand
- **role-modelling** – both positive and negative effects
- **parenting style** – what type of parent are you?
Role-modeling

What has your teen learnt about alcohol and socializing from watching you?
What can you do to be a positive role model?

Parents - powerful influence, even on teens ...

- **limit your alcohol use**, especially in front of your children
- **do not get drunk**, especially in front of your children
- **sometimes decline the offer of alcohol**
- **provide food and non-alcoholic beverages** if making alcohol available to guests
- **never drink and drive**
- **do not portray alcohol as a good way to deal with stress**, such as by saying, “I’ve had a bad day, I need a drink!”
- **use healthy ways to cope with stress** without alcohol, such as exercise, listening to music, or talking things over.
What type of parent are you and what do we know about the influence of particular parenting styles?
Parenting styles

Different types of parenting styles have been identified:

- **authoritarian** (strictness but not warmth)
- **authoritative** (warmth and strictness)
- **indulgent** (warmth but not strictness)
- **neglectful** (neither warmth nor strictness)
Parenting styles and risk of binge drinking
Bartlett, Grist & Hahn (2011)

Longitudinal UK research tracked 15,000 people over forty years - examining the four different parenting styles and their impact on future drinking behaviour.

Not surprisingly, 'tough love' (authoritative) parenting was found to be most effective in limiting the risk of future risky drinking:

- rules, consequences, bound in unconditional love
What are the barriers parents face?

There are a number of barriers to a parent's positive influence ... 

- **peers** – have greater influence in early teens - not so problematic if a positive relationship is maintained with parents during this time
- **media and advertising** – bombards young people from an early age – difficult to control
- **the Australian culture** and attitudes towards drinking
- **other parents and their attitudes and actions** – particularly around teenage parties and gatherings
- **genetics** – are there some young people that are genetically more likely to drink?
Australian study – two hypotheses were tested:

- that minors whose parents supply them with alcohol per se have increased odds of risky drinking
- where supply occurs for drinking without parental supervision, the odds of risky drinking are greater again

530 students surveyed in seven NSW high schools – Years 8-12

- alcohol consumption – non-drinkers, moderate and risky drinkers
- sources of alcohol, including parental supply
- perceptions of peers’ drinking
The Year 8 sample = 121, with just over one third of them being non-drinkers. Although most of them were provided alcohol to drink in the presence of their parents, more than one in ten of them reported that the alcohol was supplied to them to drink when other adults were present or when no adult was present.
No surprises here – as adolescents get older their parents are more willing to provide alcohol, and less concerned about ensuring that it is drunk in their presence.

Parental supply behaviour – Years 8, 10 and 12
Gilligan, Kypri, Johnson, Lynagh & Love, 2012
The study demonstrated that 13-17 year olds whose parents supply them with alcohol for drinking without parental supervision have substantially increased odds of risky drinking.

- "it is plausible that supply for consumption under parental supervision is associated with smaller volumes than supply for consumption in other circumstances"
- however, "supply for drinking under supervision did not have the protective effect that may have motivated the behaviour"
What role does genetics play in the influence a parent has on a child in this area?
What role do genetics play?
(Van der Zwaluw, Otten, Kleinjan & Engels, 2014)

Dutch study found "the interaction of specific genes and parental rules may determine whether a teen will have alcohol-related problems in the future"

- researchers identified different genotypes that could result in different neural responses to alcohol or motivations to drink ('risk' and 'non-risk')
- also examined whether parents had set specific rules regarding alcohol

Group divided into light, moderate and heavy drinkers

- 'light drinkers' - often 'non-risk' genotype and reported stricter parental rules
- 'heavy drinkers' who carried the 'risk' genotype were largely affected by parental rules – more rules, lower levels of alcohol use
- however, heavy drinkers and 'non-risk' genotype weren't so influenced by rules

Strict parental rules prevent youth from drinking more alcohol

- "however ... every adolescent responds differently to parenting efforts and the effects of parenting may depend on the genetic make-up of the adolescent"
So should parents provide alcohol or shouldn’t they?

Evidence is mixed but the key word here appears to be monitoring

- research indicates that if the child’s first drink is with their family – and that drinking is monitored – then future risky drinking is less likely
- but alcohol and the developing brain do not go together – so when is the right time?
- every family is different - each will need to make their own rules in this area
- clearly though – giving a child a couple of drinks to take to a teenage party is not appropriate – where is the monitoring at these events?
If you do think your teen should be able to drink – be honest about it! Don't make ridiculous excuses for underage drinking .... and remember it is illegal in many states to supply alcohol to teens ...
Teenage parties and alcohol

Should you let your child go to teenage parties?

- Yes! This is how they learn to socialize – but make sure you find out as much as you can about the event as possible

Should you hold teenage parties?

- Yes! But make sure your child knows that holding a party is a joint responsibility - not just yours!

Should you serve alcohol at a teenage party?

- Absolutely not! In most states this is now illegal and no matter what you think, it is impossible to monitor alcohol at this type of event
Teenage parties and alcohol

Things for you to remember as a parent:

- you are not the only one who does not provide alcohol to your child - no matter what your child tells you
- find other parents who are like-minded and create a network
- no 'expert' can tell you what to do with your child regarding alcohol - you must make your own mind up. On the other hand, don't base your decision on what your child's best friend's mother thinks is right
- make your decision based on good quality information
- never provide alcohol for an underage party - if you believe it is appropriate for your child to drink, don't assume that others feel the same way. Don't put other parents into a difficult situation ...
- will simply not providing alcohol stop them from drinking? Most probably not - but you are not making it easy and if they break your rules, there are consequences and they learn boundaries
So what can a parent do around alcohol?

We cannot inoculate our children from these issues but we can …

- **be a positive role model** – look at how you socialise with alcohol and talk about it
- **promote positive norms** - not everyone drinks and most don’t drink irresponsibly
- **create rules and consequences** around alcohol and parties early, modify them as they get older but don’t be influenced by others – stick to your guns!
- If things get out of hand, **seek professional help nice and early** – certain behaviour is not normal and needs to be addressed
Is it really okay to make rules?

13 year old Greg Hoffman got an iPhone for Christmas but it came with an 18 point contract he had to sign:

- "You are a good and responsible 13 year old boy and deserve this gift. But with the acceptance of this present comes rules and regulations ... Failure to comply with the following list will result in termination of your iPhone ownership ..."
- "If it rings, answer it. It is a phone. Say hello, use your manners. Do not ever ignore a phone call if the screen reads 'Mom' or 'Dad'. Not ever ..."
- "Do not use this technology to lie, fool, or deceive another human being. Do not involve yourself in conversations that are hurtful to others ..."
The final word ...

Tell your children they're great, all the time!
- even at their very worst there is always something positive you can find to say about your child - find it and say it!

Really listen to your child and ‘connect’
- when was the last time you really 'connected' with your child? Try to find the time at least once a week for a few minutes to 'connect' with your child

DARTA Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
For further information or you are interested in more of what I have to say ...

*Teenagers, Alcohol and Drugs* is available at your local bookstore or on-line

For a PDF copy of this presentation or a list of references and supporting information, please go to my website - www.darta.net.au

Please feel free to contact me by email - p.dillon@darta.net.au or follow me on Facebook or Twitter or go to my blog