



keeping young people  
safe around **alcohol**  
& **other substances**.



# Talking About Alcohol

## A guide for parents and carers



[talkabouttrust.org](http://talkabouttrust.org)



[talkaboutalcohol.com](http://talkaboutalcohol.com)

**Life-Stuff.org**  
Facts & advice  
for young adults

[life-stuff.org](http://life-stuff.org)

*It's a rite of passage – part of growing up*

*We can't check what they're up to when they're out with their mates*

*Our kids see soaps featuring booze and celebrities getting drunk and see it as cool and normal*

*I'm far more worried about the friends they're hanging out with*

*They don't listen to us, it's what their friends are doing that matters*

## **Is this what you're thinking?**

**Our teenagers will encounter alcohol whatever we do, so what's the point?**

Well, the first part is true, your teenagers will come across alcohol via their friends, at parties and in their everyday lives as they get older. 36% of 15 year-olds in England drink about once a month or more often – fact. However, 87% of 11 year-olds have not had a whole drink. Some will have tasted alcohol in the family home or at a celebration, but it is at this age – between 11-13 that their drinking habits for the future will be formed – and you, in your kids' opinion,

are the most important influence in their lives through:

- the examples you set,
- the house rules,
- the freedoms you allow them.

This booklet gives tips and guidance for you to approach the issue of drinking with your children, teenagers or young adults. Talking about it early on will help your child to understand alcohol and its effects, and make more informed choices about drinking in the future.

This guide is written and produced by The Talk About Trust,  
[talkabouttrust.org](http://talkabouttrust.org) and [talkaboutalcohol.com](http://talkaboutalcohol.com)

Information within this guide is based on Government and the UK Chief Medical Officers' guidelines and was current when going to press in October 2022. Statistics are drawn from: Smoking, Drinking And Drug Use Among Young People In England In 2021; The Chief Medical Officer for England's Guidance On The Consumption Of Alcohol By Children And Young People, 2009; Statistics on Alcohol: England 2021; Health Survey for England 2019, and Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle And Substance User Survey (SALSUS) 2019.

## Get talking – when do you start?

Children are naturally curious about alcohol - they see people drinking and they want to know more. Kids will be influenced by their friends, their teachers, TV, films and the media – but in most cases, parents have the biggest effect on their children's behaviour, including when they begin to drink alcohol. So, you're in a good position to make sure they have the facts about alcohol and its effects so they can make more sensible choices in the future.

### At what age should I talk about drinking?

There is no one size fits all message, however gearing your conversation to different ages helps.



### Very young children

It is illegal to give a child under five alcohol. Research shows that by the age of five, a child has already formed basic attitudes and opinions about alcohol and can recognise drunkenness. If you drink at home, your children are bound to ask questions at an early age about what you are drinking and what it tastes like. It is tempting to say 'wait until you are older', but it is worth explaining to your child that little bodies can't digest alcohol, which is 'strong' and dangerous for children.



### 11 – 13 year-olds

The average age of a first whole drink in the UK is between the ages of 13 and 14, so it's important to talk at an early age and for your child to have an understanding of units, how alcohol affects the body and liver, why young bodies can't cope with alcohol and the risks they run by experimenting. This is why the UK Chief Medical Officers recommend that children under 15 should not drink alcohol, as their brains and livers are not fully developed and are more liable to damage than adults.

At age 11, children see it as unacceptable to get drunk and more than 99% don't drink regularly, but age 13 is what we call 'the tipping point'. Growing up is an awkward time, reaching puberty, their social lives changing, relationships and peer pressure growing - and probably being less open with you. Try not to force the subject, wait until the subject comes up via the TV, the media or similar. Put a conversation about drinking in context with other 'life skills', such as staying safe, talking about drugs and what sex is all about. You might think your 'baby' is too young for all this, but unfortunately in this savvy world they'll be more informed than you think!

Often, a good approach is to talk about a risky situation involving alcohol featured in a soap, movie or in the news. Car journeys

work well as your kids can't walk off, they don't have to make eye contact and it is a neutral zone. Try to use open ended questions such as 'Tell me about' or 'What did you think about..?'

### Older teenagers

Finding the right balance between protecting teenagers and giving them freedom isn't easy. You can't be by their side all the time, and they wouldn't thank you for it anyway. However, with communication and trust, you can help them to make the right decision in a tricky situation, learn from their mistakes, come to you for advice when needed and still stay safe.

Research shows that older teenagers often experiment with alcohol in the company of their friends, either at parties or in public places. Drinking among young adults is declining though, with 24% of 16-24 year-olds choosing not to drink at all; 35% of 15 year-olds haven't even tried alcohol. Checking where your kids are and who they are with is really important at this age. Pick up and drop off at parties, check parents are present, ensure sleep over plans are genuine and be prepared to say no if you're not happy or your teenager hasn't been honest with you.

By age 16 many teenagers will drink, so talking to your kids about low risk drinking guidelines, what a unit is, how to resist peer pressure and what happens to your reactions if you combine drinking and driving, for example, is really important.



Encourage your teenagers to visit [talkaboutalcohol.com](http://talkaboutalcohol.com) and, for older teens, the [life-stuff.org](http://life-stuff.org) website has information and sources of support on many issues around health and wellbeing including gaming, mental health, money worries, drugs and vaping.

Do also visit the parents' area of [talkabouttrust.org](http://talkabouttrust.org) for film clips, our newsletter (sign up via our site) and tips, or follow us on [twitter.com/talkalcohol](https://twitter.com/talkalcohol).

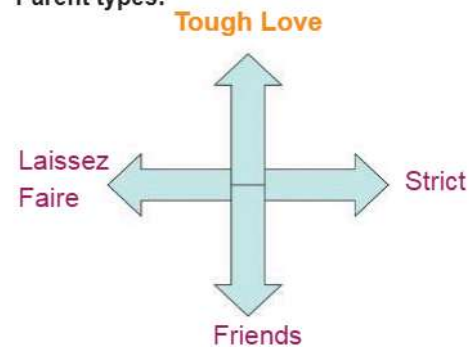


### A tough love approach

By offering tough love, you can combine a warm and responsive approach to your kids together with firm rules and clear boundaries. You are fair and firm without being too restrictive. You reason with and support your child and explain why boundaries are in place (and move these with age). Rather than being punitive, you offer rewards for good choices.

Long term, children from 'tough loving' families are characterised as more cooperative, self-regulating and socially responsible.

Parent types:





### Young adults

Once your child has gone to college or is living away from home for the first time, it is harder to influence them and you have no control over the time they come home or how they drink and eat. The path to self-respect and independence will hopefully have been laid already, but the following advice might help:

- Highlight the dangers of drunkenness, such as not getting home safely, looking a fool in front of their friends or partners and the risk of unprotected sex, assault and theft.
- Encourage them to pace themselves by staying hydrated, alternating with soft drinks, to eat before going out and to be aware of the alcohol levels of different drinks.
- Tell them to keep their mobiles fully charged and with them with a locator such as findmyfriends or snapchat on

when going out and to work out how they will get home before they go.

- Always let someone know where they are going and who with.
- Remind them to never to
  - Leave their drink (alcoholic or soft) as it could be spiked
  - Drink and drive
  - Take a lift from someone they suspect has taken drink or drugs
  - Leave a party or venue on their own.

A good wake up call if they're tempted to drink-drive is that they'll be unable to get car insurance, they'll lose their licence for at least a year and face an unlimited fine or a 6-month prison sentence. Another is the effect of a criminal record on their job prospects if they get involved in violence or damage. It's worth mentioning that they won't be able to go to the US if they have a criminal record.

## Keep talking as they get older

### Stress and peer pressure

Understand the pressures they're facing from peers and wanting to fit in. Don't fly off the handle if you discover they've been drinking. Talk it through and explain the risks they are taking - it can often be a frightening experience.

Work out your strategy - If they don't show remorse, will you ground them, or stop their allowance for a month? It's important to understand why they want to drink; reasons that teenagers give include increasing their confidence and enjoyment in social situations, getting a buzz and having something to do, being able to forget their problems, helping them fit in, to gain respect or enhance their image.

Have a look at our guide for teenagers ([talkabouttrust.org/resources/alcohol-and-you/](https://talkabouttrust.org/resources/alcohol-and-you/)) for ideas to support them or we have some great short films called 'Just A Few Drinks' made with BBC2 via [talkabouttrust.org](https://talkabouttrust.org).

### Make them feel respected

It may seem obvious, but letting your child know that you respect them often gets overlooked in busy lives. For every positive comment we make to our teenagers, we make 14 negative ones! Your child's opinions matter, and so encourage them to express their views and be supportive. Let them know in good time of any changes in your house rules that will affect them, and let them know you love them too. If their friends get into trouble and your child wasn't involved, reward them and say how proud you are that they acted so maturely.

### Set limits

It's important that children know your house rules and what happens if they break them. They will test them, so don't make threats you're not prepared to carry out. An effective

'punishment' is to remove privileges – such as grounding them for a while, stopping their allowance, cancelling having friends over, etc.

But don't forget to praise them when they do the right thing. Giving reasons for the rules helps children to stick to them and develops a sense of responsibility. Knowing who they're with and when they'll be back is important for their safety, and not just your sanity.

### Trust them

Trusting your child means they'll feel they can tell you the truth (especially about unacceptable or risky things), and you won't get angry or judge them. Being willing to listen to their side of the story, and talking through the other options, will help them to make more sensible choices in the future.

Trust is essential to open and honest communication. If your child feels safe discussing difficult issues with you, then they'll talk to you when they need to and listen to what you have to say.

Remember, you are key – through example you set, by knowing where your kids are and who they are with, sticking to rules you agree to and controlling monetary allowances, you can help ensure that your children become responsible young adults.



# Are you Alcohol Aware?

## Units and daily guidelines

UK Government guidelines for low risk drinking for adults define 'a unit' or 'drink' as 8g (1cl) of pure alcohol and recommend that men and women should not drink more than 14 units a week, spread over the week. It's not healthy to 'save up' units and drink heavily at the weekends as binge drinking can lead to health problems and anti-social behaviour. It's a good idea to have one or two alcohol free nights a week too.

Eating before or while drinking slows down how quickly alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream and so helps your liver. How alcohol affects you will also depend on your age, size, sex and health as well as how quickly you drink.

Back labels on bottles of alcoholic drinks usually contain information on units to help you keep track, such as the number of units in a glass or the whole container, as well as the alcoholic strength. You can learn more at [talkabouttrust.org](http://talkabouttrust.org)

### HOW MANY UNITS IN A DRINK?

<b>1</b>  A small bottle (275ml) of lower strength (4%) alcohol	<b>2</b>  A pint of lower strength (4%) lager, beer or cider	<b>3</b>  A pint of medium strength (5%) lager, beer or cider	<b>4</b>  A large bottle (700ml) of higher strength (5.5%) alcohol
 A half pint of lower strength (4%) lager, beer or cider	 A 440ml can of medium strength (4.5%) lager, beer or cider	 A large bottle (700ml) of lower strength (4%) alcohol	 A 500ml can of higher strength (7.5%) lager, beer or cider
 A single measure of spirit (40%)	 A standard glass (175ml) of lower strength (12%) wine or champagne	 A large glass (250ml) of lower strength (12%) wine	

**Check the label**

Most drinks tell you how many units are in them

**Know your limits**

Units of alcohol per 125ml glass



**The UK Chief Medical Officers recommend**

- Adults (both men & women) should not regularly exceed 14 units a week, spread over the week with alcohol free days
- Alcohol should be avoided when someone is planning to drive, when on certain medications (always check with a GP) and if pregnant, for example.
- The CMO advises that there is no safe level of drinking for under 18s as the brain and organs of young people are still developing and that an alcohol free childhood until at least age 15 is best.



talkaboutalcohol.com



### What does 14 units look like?

A pint of beer, lager or cider at 4% abv (2.3 units)  x 6	A 330ml bottle of beer, lager or cider at 5% abv (1.7 units)  x 8
A 50ml measure (double) of spirits at 40% abv (2.0 units)  x 7	A 125ml glass of champagne at 11% abv (1.4 units)  x 10
A 175ml glass of wine at 12% abv (2.1 units)  x 6	

**If you do drink as much as 14 units per week, it is best to spread this evenly over 3 days or more**

<b>M</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>
			-	 	 	-

There are times when we shouldn't drink, such as:

- When planning to drive (and don't forget the morning after).
- If operating machinery, using electrical equipment or working at heights, for example.
- If playing aerobic sport.
- If on certain medications - Ask your doctor if you are unsure.
- If pregnant - Alcohol crosses the placenta to the foetus and can lead to birth defects.

## How too much alcohol affects the body

### Brain

Too much alcohol acts as a depressant on the brain, the control centre of the body. It can make the drinker feel happy for a little while, but any improvement in mood is temporary and people usually feel worse after drinking too much. Alcohol can depress the central nervous system leading to slurred speech, unsteady movement, disturbed perceptions, and an inability to react quickly. Long-term drinking can kill off brain cells and lead to memory loss and mental problems as well as alcohol dependency.

### Head

After a few drinks, behaviour changes. The person drinking may feel more relaxed, emotional and uninhibited, but they also lose control. Their judgement is affected too. They might make a fool of themselves, get into trouble, cause an accident or do something they regret later. Every year, 18-22% of accidental deaths are alcohol-related. Alcohol draws water out of the brain. So, as the body starts to break down alcohol, the drinker may feel dizzy and be in for a throbbing headache if they drink too much.

### Heart

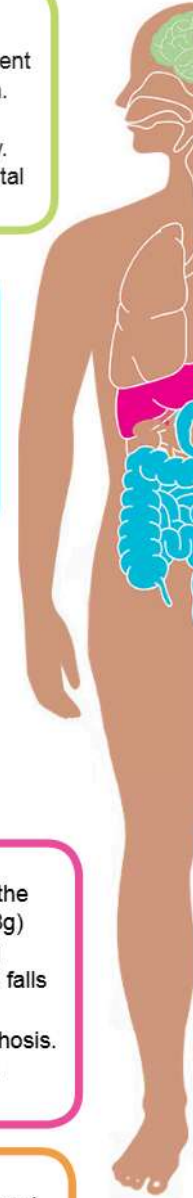
Drinking large quantities of alcohol over a short period can cause irregular heart beats and shortness of breath, leading to panic attacks and illness. Moderate drinking, that is 1 or 2 units a day, may offer some protection from heart disease in men over 40 and in post-menopausal women, but it is not advised that an adult takes up drinking if they don't already. It is more important to be physically active, eat a healthy, balanced diet and to avoid smoking.

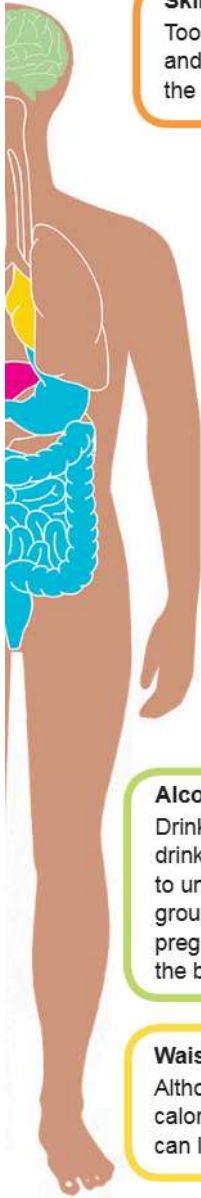
### Liver

The liver breaks down most of the alcohol a person drinks (the rest leaves the body in breath, urine and sweat). But it can only break down about 1 unit (8g) of alcohol an hour in an average adult. More than that, and it stops working properly. If the body can't cope with all the alcohol in its system, the person falls into an alcoholic coma (which can be fatal). Long-term heavy drinking kills off liver cells, leading to a disease called cirrhosis. It's a 'silent' disease – symptoms may not be noticeable until the disease is advanced. Long-term excessive drinking can also lead to liver cancer.

### Armpits

Excess alcohol is also excreted as smelly body odour and bad breath - not great for attracting partners.





#### **Skin**

Too much alcohol dehydrates the body, which is bad news for the skin and complexion. It also dilates the blood vessels under the surface of the skin, leading to ugly veins on the nose and cheeks.

#### **Eyes**

Too much alcohol dilates blood vessels in the eyes, so they can look red and bloodshot. It also affects the signals sent from the eyes to the brain - vision becomes blurred, and distances and speeds get harder to judge. Many road accidents involve drivers or pedestrians who have alcohol in their blood.

Too much alcohol also suppresses REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep. It's the most important phase of sleep so drinking heavily can ruin the chance of a good night's rest.

#### **Gut**

Alcohol is absorbed from the stomach into the bloodstream. The body's ability to process alcohol depends on various things, like age, weight and sex. Alcohol breaks down in the body at a rate of roughly one unit per hour and therefore drinking more than one unit of alcohol an hour will build up the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) and it may be many hours before it is safe to drive. After a night of heavy drinking a person risks being over the drink drive limit the next morning. Learn more at [morning-after.org.uk](http://morning-after.org.uk)

#### **Alcohol and sex**

Drinking too much alcohol can affect performance in the bedroom because the drinker is not fully in control of their body. Alcohol affects judgement too, leading to unsafe sex. 40% of 16-24 year-old girls and 31% of boys of the same age group reported having had unprotected sex after binge drinking. If someone is pregnant, they shouldn't drink because alcohol crosses the placenta directly to the baby and can cause Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

#### **Waist**

Although alcohol is fat free, it is very calorific (only fat contains more calories per gram) and increases your appetite, so excess drinking can lead to weight gain.

For more information, please visit  
[talkaboutalcohol.com/interactive-body/](http://talkaboutalcohol.com/interactive-body/)

## The law and underage drinking

It is important to be aware of guidelines, facts and the law about alcohol in the UK.

**Under 5?** It is illegal to give alcohol to under 5s.

**Under 16?** It is at the landlord's discretion as to whether children are allowed anywhere in a pub. They cannot of course, buy or drink alcohol on the premises.

**Under 18?** If you are under 18, it is illegal to buy alcohol (this includes in any shop or supermarket, off licenses, bars, clubs or restaurants and buying on line). It is illegal to buy alcohol for someone under 18 in a licensed premises, the only exception is for 16 or 17 year-olds who are allowed to drink beer, wine or cider with food if with an adult (but they may not).

It is legal for anyone over 5 to drink alcohol. The restrictions apply to purchasing (under 18) and location - in licensed premises, public places or alcohol exclusion zones.

Police have powers to confiscate alcohol from under 18s drinking in public spaces (e.g. in the street or in parks).



## Drinking and driving

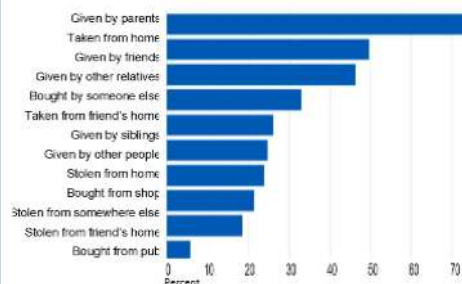
It's against the law to drive with more than 80mg (milligrams) alcohol per 100ml (millilitres) of blood, or 50mg in Scotland. If you break the law, you face having your licence taken away for at least a year and an unlimited fine or up to six months in prison. Causing death through careless driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs can result in life imprisonment.



## Buying under 18s alcohol

Police have the power to charge those over 18 who knowingly buy alcohol for anyone under the legal drinking age (buying by proxy). It is important that older friends and family know that they could be charged for supplying alcohol irresponsibly. As it is increasingly difficult for under 18s to buy alcohol, parents or guardians are now the main providers of alcohol for this age group (75%) putting a huge responsibility on you to keep youngsters safe and out of trouble.

Where do young people aged 11-15 obtain alcohol?



Source: Statistics on Alcohol, England 2021



### Can I let my kids drink at home?

Some parents allow their children to try a little alcohol with them on special occasions; others prefer not to. There is some evidence that shows drinking at an earlier age increases the possibility of alcohol-related harm later on, but other studies show young people introduced to drinking moderately in the home, with good parental role models are less likely to binge and more likely to develop moderate drinking habits. Remember, there is a world of difference between sips on special occasions and whole drinks, so the UK Chief Medical Officers (CMO) recommend that parents should not allow their children to drink alcohol at home under the age of 15.

Whatever you decide, stick to your guns and make sure your child understands why it can be dangerous for young people to drink. Be prepared to say NO if you are uncomfortable with party situations and lay down ground rules. Children should also know that there are laws restricting the age at which you can buy and drink alcohol.

With older teenagers, you need to aim for a balance: warning them of the dangers and making them aware of the law; but also saying that they can enjoy moderate

social drinking when they're adults if they choose to. The important thing is to focus on the facts, and to give your child the knowledge and skills to avoid the dangers associated with alcohol.

#### CMO Guidance:

(1) Children and their parents and carers are advised that an alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest and best option. However, if children drink alcohol, it should not be until at least the age of 15 years.

(2) If young people aged 15 to 17 years consume alcohol it should always be with the guidance of a parent or carer or in a supervised environment.

(3) Parents and young people should be aware that drinking, even at age 15 or older, can be hazardous to health and that not drinking is the healthiest option for young people.

If 15 to 17 year-olds do consume alcohol they should do so infrequently and certainly on no more than one day a week. Young people aged 15 to 17 years should never exceed recommended Government guidelines.

## Perfect parents

So, how can you make sure you don't drink too much?

The place where your children are most likely to absorb what you're up to is at home – and it's where we do most of our relaxation, socialising and drinking. It's often all too easy for the drinks to add up without you realising – These tips might help ensure you drink sensibly when you're at home or out with friends and are a good role model.

## Units and mixing

The amount of alcohol in drinks can be confusing, so keep an eye on how many units are in your drink. Many drinks carry unit icons on the packaging or back labels to help you keep a tab on your intake. To give you an idea, a glass of wine can contain anything from 1.5 units for a small glass of sparkling wine at 11%, to 3 units for a 250ml glass at 12%. A double vodka or whisky will contain 2 units, but home pours of spirits are usually more generous and you could be drinking much more than you realise.

## Pace yourself

Try alternating alcohol drinks with soft drinks - you'll stay more hydrated and give your liver a chance to break down the alcohol. Watch out for 'top ups' too – you can kid yourself that you're still on the same drink. Empty your glass first before having another drink, so you can keep more of a tally on your intake.

## A bite to eat

If possible, try and drink with food, or eat before you go out. Alcohol has much more of an effect on an empty stomach as it's absorbed more quickly into the blood stream, and you tend to drink faster without food.

## Having friends over

If you're mixing your own drinks, make sure they're not too strong – home pours are usually much larger and glasses bigger too. Use plenty of ice and fruit in drinks or use exotic mixers. If guests are mixing their own, have a spirits measure to hand. Check back labels to choose drinks with lower alcohol content and there are some delicious recipes for non-alcoholic alternatives too.

Make sure your nibbles and snacks are substantial, watch out for salty snacks as they make you want to drink more!

Offer water and imaginative low alcohol or soft drinks, especially if your friends are driving home. If you're worried a guest has drunk too much, make sure they can get home safely – have taxi details to hand, arrange for someone to take them home, or offer them a bed for night if needed.





## **Parents' fact file**

### **Facts that might get your kids to think about their drinking**

It's no good just telling teenagers that drinking too much is bad for them, you think you're untouchable as a youth - Wait for that familiar rolling of eyes, and 'Well you drink Mum, don't you?'. Or if you don't drink, it's that 'Well, what would you understand about it?'.

What's more effective is to focus on what could happen to them now, if things get out of hand and to give them the tools to get out of a tricky situation so that they know what to do if things go wrong.

### **FACT 1 - You're the tops**

According to the GfK Roper Youth Report, 71% of children aged 13 to 17 say that their parents are the number one influence on whether they drink alcohol. A survey by the YMCA though found that parents were important influencers, but that they weren't seen by most teenagers as good role models and didn't set ground rules that they stuck to. Only 21% said that their parents or other adults they knew were good role models. Although 55% of young people say that their school provides clear rules and boundaries, and their behaviour is monitored in the community by neighbours and others, barely a quarter (27%) say they have to abide by clear rules and consequences in their family, or that their parents keep track of where they are.

### **Know where they are and who they're with**

Research clearly shows that if parental monitoring is in place - that is knowing where your kids are and who they're with - teenagers are much less likely to begin to use drugs or alcohol at an early age.

**FACT 2 - Most teenagers DON'T regularly go out and get drunk, or drink heavily**

The first thing to remember is that in spite of the headlines out there condemning 'booze Britain' and 'ladettes', most teenagers do not go out to get drunk; in fact, the majority of school-going children across Europe, including the UK, have never had a whole drink!

The number of teenagers experimenting with alcohol is falling in the UK. In England, the percentage of 11-15 year-olds who have ever consumed a whole alcoholic drink has decreased, from 61% in 2001 to 40% in 2021. Regular underage drinking (at least weekly) has also declined from 20% of 11-15 year-olds in 2001 to 6% in 2021 – so 94% don't drink regularly and, of those who drink, 82% consume below 15 units per week. In Scotland in 2018, only 36% of 13 year-olds reported ever having an alcoholic drink; for 15 year-olds the figure was 71%.

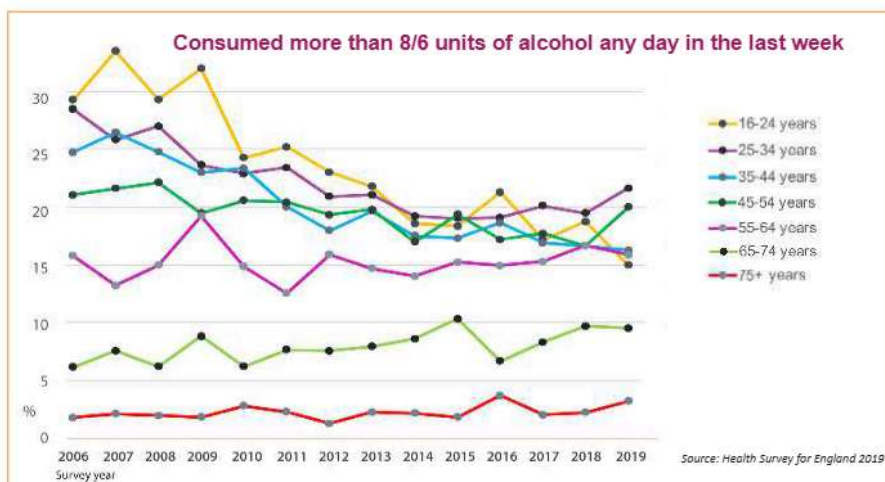
Binge drinking (more than 8 units for men and 6 units for women per occasion) also fell from 29% among 16-24 year-olds in 2006 to 15% in 2019. This means that a big majority of young adults (85%) go out to enjoy themselves and socialise, not to get drunk.



**FACT 3 - 'The Tipping Point'**

Less than 1% of 11 year-olds will be drinking alcohol weekly, but in 2011/13 our study of over 4,400 Year 8 pupils in 30 schools across England found that age 13 was the tipping point with 42% having had whole drink by age 13, although overwhelmingly in a supervised environment.

In 2021, 20% of 15 year-olds in England had consumed alcohol in the last week. Of those who had consumed alcohol during the last 4 weeks, 20% had experienced being drunk in that period. (In Scotland, 20% of 15 year-olds had consumed alcohol in the last week and 71% had ever been drunk). This is why it is so important to talk about drinking, its effects and risks in a balanced way before the age of 13 and regularly from then on and carefully monitor their social lives.





#### **FACT 4 - Don't send them underground**

Talking openly with your kids is hugely important. Secret drinking with friends away from home does happen. Streets and local parks were the most usual drinking place for 32% of 10-19 year-olds (Talbot and Crabbe) and at parties, so it's important to know where your kids are, who they're with and what time you expect them home. If you discover that they have been drinking, don't fly off the handle. Sit down calmly and let them tell you what happened, then explain the dangers that they face.

#### **FACT 5 - What happens to teenagers who get drunk?**

As teenagers lose their inhibitions when they are drunk, they are far more likely to be involved in an accident, a violent incident and to engage in other risky behaviours such as smoking, drugs and unprotected sex.

If a teenager drinks regularly before they are 15 they are:

- 7 times more likely to be in a car crash because of drinking, and
- 11 times more likely to suffer unintentional injuries after drinking
- GCSE predictions fall by 20 points - that's the difference between a 9 and a 5.

Even drinking to get drunk occasionally can have serious consequences as it increases risky behaviour. Teenagers who get drunk are far more likely to:

- injure themselves or someone else – even accidentally
- engage in unsafe sex, which could result in sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies
- be robbed – especially of cash and mobile devices
- end up going home with a stranger on their own
- get in a fight, an argument or relationship problems
- get into trouble with the police and end up with a criminal record.

Always encourage your kids to look out for each other, plan how they are going to get home before going out, to keep their mobiles fully charged and switched on and to keep enough money aside in case of emergencies.



## Practical ways of delaying teenage drinking

Research shows that the younger a person is when they start to drink regularly, the greater their risk of alcohol-related problems later in life. By highlighting the short term effects of getting drunk, such as being sexually assaulted or robbed, plus the embarrassment of looking a fool in front of their mates, you can help delay the age that teenagers start drinking and the amount they consume. This is more effective than just saying 'don't' or using scare tactics.

These tips should help:

- Encourage sports, hobbies, clubs and social activities that keep your kids active and fulfilled.
- Teenagers say boredom and hanging around with nothing to do is a reason for drinking. Encourage them to get a holiday job or volunteer.
- Establish routines, like mealtimes, that mean you can spend some time together and talk to each other. This helps your child to feel they can come to you if they have a problem.
- Make sure you know the facts and laws about alcohol and can talk in a balanced and constructive way about the pros and cons of drinking.
- Talk and listen to your teenager. It is



important that they hear your views and that you hear theirs. Use everyday opportunities, for example a storyline in a TV programme, as a prompt.

- Make sure the ground rules are clear, discuss them with all family members, and be clear about what is allowed and not allowed. Have consequences for breaking rules and enforce them such as stopping their allowance or grounding them.
- Check where they're going and who they're with, and always make sure they've got a fully charged mobile with them and that they keep it on.
- Follow the party tips on the opposite page.

## How to recognise if your child is secretly drinking

Look out for:

- abrupt mood swings for no apparent or good reason
- skipping classes, or just not going in to school
- frequent lateness
- money disappearing from your purse/ wallet
- disappearing to their room the moment they come in for the day
- significant change in school performance
- restlessness or tiredness
- smelling of alcohol
- suddenly using breath mints or brushing teeth regularly
- wanting to stay over in friends' houses, especially after parties
- becoming very secretive (more so than usual).



### Going to parties

Most teenagers will want to start going to parties at friends' houses. This guidance will help them stay safe.

- Speak to the host parents, even if you don't know them. Tell your child you're not prepared to let them go otherwise. Check an adult will be present and their policy on alcohol.
- If you can, drop your teenager off and pick them up, or share lifts with parents you trust.
- If sleeping over after a party at another friend's house, check plans are genuine and again speak to the parents. Ask your child to ring or text you when they're safely at their friend's house.
- Make sure your teenager has had a good meal before they go out, such as pasta.
- Check they have a fully charged mobile that they must keep on, and that you have planned how and what time they are getting home.
- Be prepared to say no if you're unhappy about a party or if your child doesn't want you to speak to the host... there'll be rows, but it's because you care, not because you're being a killjoy.
- Don't feel pressured by younger teens to provide them with alcohol to take with them to parties. They may tell you everyone else's parents do this, but that's just not true... or threaten you that they'll ask their mates to buy it for them instead (explain they risk their friend being fined or charged).

- If your teen breaks your agreement, such as what time to be home, then make sure you carry through your threats, such as grounding them or stopping their spending money for a month.

### Holding a house party

At some stage you may feel happy to host a party at home for your teenager. Follow our advice if you want it to go well!

- Think carefully before you say yes. Especially if the kids are under 16.
- Agree the list of invites with your teenager. Don't make the party too long.
- Warn your teen about how they invite their friends – no open invitations on Facebook or chat on Instagram/whatsapp.
- Agree the house rules and put your teen in charge.
- You might have to stay out of sight for your kids street cred., but stick around.
- Provide plenty of food – not salty snacks, but carbs.
- Teenagers do sneak in alcohol in water bottles, mixed with soft drinks etc., so be prepared and work out how you'll handle this.
- Have loads of soft drinks and iced water available.
- If anyone is sick or ill contact their parents and never leave them unattended.
- Try and avoid big sleepovers, as the kids won't get much sleep (or you probably) and you won't know what's going on once you're in bed!
- Make sure you've warned your neighbours and have a reasonable finish time, allowing parents to pick up and get to bed too!
- If it goes well, don't forget to tell your teen how proud you are of them & their mates.

For advice and guidance for older teenagers signpost them to [life-stuff.org](https://www.life-stuff.org) or follow on Instagram and Tiktok via @[Life\\_stuff.Org](https://www.instagram.com/Life_stuff.Org)

## Drink Spiking

Teenagers and young adults should be aware of the issue of drink spiking. A shocking 1 in 10 young adults are estimated to have been victims of drink spiking (source: AET survey 2021, The Tab student survey 2021, NUS survey and You Gov poll 2021, Home Affairs data 2022). The majority of reported drink spiking incidents are not linked to any additional crime and are most likely to be the result of a prank, but drink spiking can be linked to sexual assault and robbery. Whatever the intent, drink spiking is illegal and people who spike drinks can be charged, fined or jailed.

### To help prevent drink spiking

- Advise your teenager to party with trusted friends. Encourage them to discuss how they will watch out for each other while at the venue.
- Ideally, they shouldn't accept any drinks from strangers. Tell them to buy their own drink and watch the bartender prepare it.
- If they wish to accept the offer of a drink from someone they don't know well, suggest they accompany the person to the bar and take the drink from the bartender themselves.
- Warn them to be especially wary if someone buys them a drink and it's not the type of drink they requested.
- Tell them to never leave their drinks unattended and to ask a friend to watch over the drinks if they have to leave the table or, if they buy drinks that come in bottles with screw-top lids, they can carry the bottle in their bag when they go to the toilet or have a dance.
- If they think their drink might have been spiked, they should not consume it.
- If they see someone spike a drink or if they suspect that drink spiking may be occurring they should tell the manager or host immediately.



### Symptoms of drink spiking

It may not be possible to tell if a drink has been spiked by smelling it or tasting it. The substances used to spike drinks are often colourless and odourless. The symptoms of drink spiking can depend on many factors such as the substance or mix of substances used, the dose, their size and weight, and how much alcohol they have already consumed. Symptoms may include feeling drunk, woozy or drowsy; feeling drunker than expected; mental confusion; hallucinations; speech difficulties such as slurring; memory loss; loss of inhibitions; nausea and vomiting; seizures; loss of consciousness; an unusually long hangover; or a severe hangover when they had little or no alcohol to drink.

- If a person becomes unwell after drinking a trusted friend or adult should take them to a safe area and stay with them, keep a close eye on their condition and call an ambulance if their condition deteriorates in any way. Always report suspected drink spiking, both to the venue (who may have CCTV) and police, or we can't help stop the practice.

For advice and guidance for older teenagers signpost them to [life-stuff.org](https://www.life-stuff.org) or follow on Instagram and Tiktok via [@Life\\_stuff.Org](https://www.instagram.com/Life_stuff.Org)



## If it all goes wrong

Talk to your child about how to react if someone they are with loses consciousness after drinking. Teenagers and inexperienced drinkers are particularly vulnerable from alcohol poisoning.

### If it all goes wrong, it's essential to get help:

- Get an ambulance but don't leave them... ask someone reliable to call the ambulance.
- Keep them on their side with their head turned to the side (the recovery position).
- Make sure they're breathing and their mouth and airways are clear.
- If they stop breathing, start mouth to mouth resuscitation.
- Loosen any tight clothing that might restrict their breathing.
- Keep them warm (but not too hot) - with blankets or a coat.

### If someone vomits they should:

- Try to keep them sitting up or, if they must lie down, make sure they're in the recovery position and that their mouth and airway are clear.
- If they begin to choke, get help immediately.
- Stay with them even if they can't bear the sight or smell of someone vomiting. Alcohol poisoning is extremely dangerous. It can lead to a coma and in extreme cases, death.

## If you want to know more...

If you want to know more about alcohol issues, or are worried about your own or your child's drinking, then there are people who can help. You could also talk to your doctor who can refer you, or the following sites could help:

**Adfam** provides information and advice for families of alcohol and drug users. The website has a list of local family support services.

Tel: 0207 553 7640

[adfam.org.uk](http://adfam.org.uk)

**Drinkline** - If you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call this free helpline, in complete confidence. They can put you in touch with your local alcohol advice centre for help and advice.

Tel: 0300 123 1110 (weekdays 9am – 8pm, weekends 11am – 4pm).

**The National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACOA)** provides information, advice and support for everyone affected by their parent's drinking.

[nacoa.org.uk](http://nacoa.org.uk)

### NHS alcohol support

[nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/](http://nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/)

**Talk to Frank** Find details of local and national services that provide counselling and treatment in England.

[talktofrank.com](http://talktofrank.com)

**We Are With You** provides free, confidential support to young people and adults experiencing issues with drugs, alcohol or mental health. It manages more than 120 services in 80 locations in England and Scotland.

[wearewithyou.org.uk](http://wearewithyou.org.uk)

For more information on drinking guidelines and being a good parent there is plenty of advice via the dedicated parent area of our website, [talkabouttrust.org](http://talkabouttrust.org)

You can also:

- Sign up for our free half-termly newsletter at [talkabouttrust.org/parent-newsletter](http://talkabouttrust.org/parent-newsletter)
- Follow us on Twitter [@talkalcohol](https://twitter.com/talkalcohol) and 'Like' our Facebook page [facebook.com/talkaboutalcohol](https://facebook.com/talkaboutalcohol)
- Speak to your child's school about a session for parents. Contact our parent coordinators:  
kathryn@talkabouttrust.org in the North  
karen@talkabouttrust.org in the South West and Midlands  
soraya@talkabouttrust.org in London and the South East  
shona@talkabouttrust.org in Scotland
- For general enquiries, teacher training events or to order resources, contact [kate@talkabouttrust.org](mailto:kate@talkabouttrust.org)

#### Other useful websites for parents

**NHS Livewell** – [nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx](http://nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx) – A website and information campaign for consumers on responsible drinking coordinated by The Department of Health and the NHS.

**Drinkaware** – [drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking](http://drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking) – Advice on understanding and preventing underage drinking.

#### Websites for teenagers

**Talk About Alcohol** - An interactive advice hub for 12 - 15 year olds using games, quizzes and activities to raise knowledge, awareness and resilience around alcohol and cannabis – [talkaboutalcohol.com](http://talkaboutalcohol.com)

**Life Stuff (16+)** - Facts and support on all aspects of wellbeing including alcohol, cannabis, vaping, gaming, budgeting and other life stuff for young adults aged 16 - 25 – [life-stuff.org](http://life-stuff.org)

**The Mix** – [themix.org.uk](http://themix.org.uk)

**Talk to Frank** – [talktofrank.com](http://talktofrank.com)

**Young Minds** – [youngminds.org.uk](http://youngminds.org.uk)

**Rise Above** – [riseabove.org.uk](http://riseabove.org.uk)

**Alateen** – [al-anonuk.org.uk](http://al-anonuk.org.uk)



If you have any feedback or comments regarding this guide or the web materials on [alcoholeducationtrust.org](http://alcoholeducationtrust.org), please email [info@talkabouttrust.org](mailto:info@talkabouttrust.org). If you'd like to be involved, or make a donation to help support our important work, please visit [talkabouttrust.org](http://talkabouttrust.org).

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