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# Alcohol - A Guide for Parents

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## WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

The definition of alcohol given by the World Health Organisation is:

“Alcohol is a psychoactive substance with dependence-producing properties that has been widely used in many cultures for centuries. The harmful use of alcohol causes a large disease, social and economic burden in societies.”

Types of alcohol include:

- Wine
- Beer/lager/cider
- Alcopops
- Spirits such as vodka, gin and whisky

## THE LAW ABOUT ALCOHOL

It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to drink alcohol in public. It is against the law for someone to sell alcohol to, or purchase alcohol for, someone under 18. It is also illegal for an adult to buy alcohol for someone under 18, or to drink it in a licensed premises, such as a bar, pub or restaurant.

If a young person is aged between 16 and 17 and accompanied by an adult, they can drink beer, wine or cider with a meal. In addition, if they are under 16, they may be able to go into a pub with an adult (someone over 18), but this depends on the license of the establishment.

Those aged 5-16 can drink alcohol at home or on other private premises. It is illegal to give alcohol to anyone under the age of 5.

## ALCOHOLIC UNITS

The strength of alcohol is based on the individual ABV (Alcohol By Volume) and amount consumed. It is measured in 'units'. It is important to remember that certain brands can have a higher alcoholic strength compared to others.

A unit of alcohol is:

- Cider - 218ml of standard 4.5% ABV
- Wine - 76ml of standard 13% ABV
- Whisky - 25ml of standard 40% ABV
- Beer - 250ml of standard 4% ABV
- Alcopol - 275ml of standard 4% ABV

It is recommended that men and women don't drink more than 14 units per week.

## YOUNG PEOPLE & ALCOHOL

There are many reasons why young people may experiment in consuming alcohol. Some of these include:

- To take risks. This is especially the case as children become teenagers. This includes pushing the boundaries and breaking rules.
- Peer pressure from friends who might be drinking and offer your child alcohol.
- Replicating a parent's drinking or that of older siblings; particularly relating drinking alcohol to 'having a good time'.
- Drinking alcohol is also seen as an 'adult pastime', so they may feel that doing this makes them grown up.
- They may have problems related to bullying, depression or mental health and use drinking alcohol as an escape mechanism.

## WAYS TO PREVENT UNDERAGE DRINKING

There are a number of ways that you can prevent underage drinking. These include:

- Look at your own relationship with alcohol. Regularly drinking more than 14 units a week and regularly drinking alcohol to relieve stress or anxieties may promote a similar pattern to your children.
- Similar to smoking and drugs, children need advice on how to refuse alcohol when offered it by friends or peers.
- Looking at alternative lifestyles is important so that children feel that they don't need to turn to alcohol if they are bored or worried about something.

## TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT DRINKING ALCOHOL

Like many issues that our children face, drinking alcohol is something that we need to talk to them about. Whilst children will learn about the effects of alcohol on their health and society in school, it is important that they can ask parents questions and that we have the time to listen to them. Some key points that we can raise are:

- When children are younger, they see us as their role models. They value our advice and if we don't answer their questions, they will speak to others who may give them misinformation.
- We want our children to have a healthy life and if we don't address issues about alcohol at a young age, it may lead to them damaging their bodies. Drinking alcohol through childhood can affect their bodies, as their brain and other areas are still developing.
- We need to develop the resilience of our children to show them that alcohol is not the answer to their problems. If we can build up mindfulness and the ability to relax, combined with promoting a healthy lifestyle, this will help them to make sensible choices.

## USEFUL WEBSITES

**NHS Choices** - <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx>

**Alcohol Education Trust** - <http://alcoholeducationtrust.org/>

**Drinkaware** - <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

**Alcohol Concern** - <https://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/>