



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

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# YOU, YOUR CHILD AND ALCOHOL



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Two in every five Welsh 15-year-olds say they drink alcohol weekly. Half have been drunk at least twice in their lifetime. This means that as a parent the subject of your child and alcohol is likely to come up.

Even from an early age children develop ideas and attitudes about alcohol. Parents and carers can play a key role in encouraging a responsible attitude to alcohol.

Research shows that children may be protected from the negative effects of drinking if they have strong bonds with family and if their parents:

- Recognise and praise positive behaviour;
- Set healthy examples; and
- Have accurate knowledge of the negative effects of alcohol.



Adapted from the leaflet **You, your child and alcohol** with permission from the Public Health Agency (Northern Ireland)

## The risks to your child

Some parents may feel that giving their child a small amount of alcohol in their early teens will give them a responsible attitude to alcohol. There is no scientific evidence to support this.

In fact, research shows that the earlier a child starts drinking the higher his or her risk of serious alcohol-related problems later in life.

There are many other risks associated with alcohol. These include:

- during late adolescence the brain is still growing – there are parts that will not be fully developed until individuals are in their early 20s. The part of the brain that is involved in planning and judgment matures late, as does the part relating to long-term memory and learning. By drinking, young people could prevent these parts of the brain developing properly;
- young people are generally smaller and weigh less than adults, so alcohol is more concentrated in their bodies and they feel the effects of alcohol more quickly and for longer. Young people may also be less able to judge or control their drinking; and
- alcohol is linked with depression.

**Alcohol can reduce your child's inhibitions and lead them to do things that are out of character.**



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They can get involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour such as fights, damaging property or causing annoyance in the community. This could lead to your child being involved with the police.

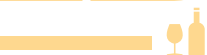
This type of behaviour could get your child a criminal record which can make it harder for them to get a job when they're older. It can also affect them if they are going abroad because some countries may refuse entry to people with a criminal record.

Alcohol can make your child more likely to be a victim of assault or other crimes. The younger people are when they drink, the more likely they are to be a victim of violence.

It can also make them more vulnerable to:

- **injuries from accidents, such as falls and road accidents;**
- **using drugs and solvents;**
- **unwanted sexual activity;**
- **unsafe sexual activity, which can lead to sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy;**
- **problems at school, such as poorer school performance or truancy; and**
- **having difficulties in relationships with family or friends.**

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## Talking with your child about alcohol

These tips can help you talk with your child about alcohol and establish boundaries around drinking. Remember, it's best not to wait until your child starts drinking before you talk to them about alcohol.

### Talking with your child about alcohol

#### Do

Make the first move and bring up the topic of alcohol.  
Don't wait until there's a problem before you talk.

Make time to listen to what they have to say.

Respect their views if you want the same in return.

Discuss the risks associated with drinking alcohol.

Discuss possible consequences of their actions and support them to make the right choices.

#### Don't

Assume your child doesn't want to talk. Not talking to your child about alcohol could be interpreted as your approval of them drinking.

Assume they already know everything.

Interrupt or be judgmental, even if you don't agree with their opinion.

### Agreeing alcohol rules and boundaries

#### Do

Set realistic rules and boundaries and stick to them.

Agree rules together with your child. Rules are more likely to be kept if they are negotiated, understood and agreed.

Discuss why you need the rules. This can help your child see that you care about their well-being.

Reach for an agreement on consequences of breaking rules. Make sure it's something fair and appropriate and something you are prepared to follow through on.

Reward your child when they keep to the set boundaries.

#### Don't

Impose rules that you haven't discussed with your child.



## If your child comes home drunk

### Do

Stay calm.

Wait until the next day to discuss things.

Choose a good time to talk.

If you're worried, always seek medical advice.

### Don't

Talk things through when your child is under the influence of alcohol.

Get drawn into arguments.

## Supervising your child

### Do

Know who your child is with and what they're doing.

Show an interest in what your child's interests are, who their friends are, and where they like to hang out.

Get to know your child's friends – if your child's friends drink alcohol, your child is more likely to drink too.

Talk to the parents of your child's friends and agree boundaries together.

When asking about your child's activities, friends and whereabouts, make sure your child knows it's because you care about them, not because you distrust them.

If you keep alcohol in the home be aware of how accessible it is.

### Don't

Assume other parents have the same ideas as you regarding children and alcohol – find out their views.

## Does your drinking influence your child?

Children often copy what their parents do and how they act. What you do may influence your child as much as what you say. It may be useful to think about your own relationship with alcohol and what messages it could be sending to your child. Think about your own drinking habits, even if you aren't a heavy drinker.

## Do you ever - drink to relax or relieve stress?

**Situation** After a hard day at work the first thing you do is open a bottle of wine or beer.

**Possible message to your child** Could your child see alcohol as an adult way to relieve stress or anxiety and think drinking would be a grown up way of coping with exam pressure or other difficulties in their life?

## Do you ever - drink to get drunk?

**Situation** You tend to use alcohol to get drunk and don't pay too much attention to the recommended daily guidelines (see page 9)

**Possible message to your child** Would your child think that alcohol is for getting you drunk and that advice on recommended daily guidelines can just be ignored?

## Do you ever - joke about being drunk?

**Situation** You enjoy having a joke about things you or others have done while drunk.

**Possible message to your child** Could your child think you approve of people getting drunk and doing silly things? Might they think, if you find it funny when people get drunk, you wouldn't mind too much if they do it?

## Do you ever - ignore your own advice?

**Situation** You've advised your child about the risks associated with drinking too much, but when it comes to your own drinking you ignore this advice.

**Possible message to your child** Could your child think guidelines and boundaries around drinking aren't important and needn't be kept to?



## How much do you know about alcohol?

There are recommended daily guidelines for adults, and drinking above these increases the risk of damage to your health. Risks include cancer, heart disease and stroke.





## What are the recommended daily guidelines for adults?

Men should not drink more than 3-4 units in any one day. Women should not drink more than 2-3 units in any one day.

These guidelines are daily totals as it is harmful to 'save up' your units.

These guidelines are for adult drinkers – they do not apply to people under 18, people on medication, pregnant women or older people, who should seek further advice from their GP.

Three units of alcohol is roughly:

one pint of lager, or.....	
one large glass of wine (175ml), or.....	
two pub measures of spirits, or.....	
two alcopops.....	

Your child's mind and body is still developing, and drinking can be hazardous to their health.

An alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest and best option.



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## Would you like to help young people to make sensible choices about alcohol?

### **The Strengthening Families Programme could be for you.**

The early teenage years can be a difficult time for young people, with a natural desire to experiment and pressure from friends potentially leading them into behaviours that can damage their health.

For many parents, bringing up the subject of alcohol with their children is not easy. Parents may think that they have little influence on their children's decisions as they enter into their teenage years, or they may even be a little unsure how to broach the subject.

The truth is, parents often underestimate how much influence they actually have on their children and the power they have to set appropriate boundaries.

But for parents to feel confident enough to talk to their children about alcohol and to empower them to set appropriate boundaries, they may need more information and advice.

The Strengthening Families Programme recognises that many of the factors that protect young people from alcohol and drug abuse, or put them at greater risk of such abuse, are linked to family life and parenting.

The programme aims to develop parenting and communication skills, and enhance young people's ability to avoid health-damaging behaviours.

**Designed for parents and young people aged 10-14, the programme takes place over 7 weeks, with 2-hour sessions each week.**

**There are currently Strengthening Families Programmes in Cardiff, Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Flintshire, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Wrexham and Rhondda Cynon Taf.**

**If you would like more information contact:**

<b>Caerphilly</b>	<b>07824 596991</b> <b>sfp@caerphillyfamilies.co.uk</b>
<b>Cardiff</b>	<b>02920468589</b> <b>sfp@cardiff.gov.uk</b>
<b>Carmarthenshire</b>	<b>01554 744377</b> <b>family.communityteam@actionforchildren.org.uk</b>
<b>Flintshire</b>	<b>01244 551247</b>
<b>Merthyr Tydfil</b>	<b>01685 727395</b> <b>office@drugaidcymru.com</b>
<b>Rhondda Cynon Taf</b>	<b>01443 827000</b> <b>FamiliesFirst@rctcbc.gov.uk</b>
<b>Swansea</b>	<b>01792 472002</b> <b>mail@swanseadp.org.uk</b>
<b>Wrexham</b>	<b>01978 729786</b> <b>parenting@wrexham.gov.uk</b>

\* Some Strengthening Families projects are part of a research trial. This means that not all applicants will be able to attend the programme.

### **For more information**

Drink Wise Wales is any easy-to-use bilingual website giving information on sensible drinking, where you can calculate how much you are drinking, and learn about how alcohol affects your body. There's also information on the number of calories in popular alcoholic drinks, and a reaction game demonstrating how alcohol can slow you down.

**[www.drinkwisewales.org.uk](http://www.drinkwisewales.org.uk) and [www.yfeddoethcymru.org.uk](http://www.yfeddoethcymru.org.uk)**

DAN, the Wales Drug and Alcohol Helpline, provides free and confidential information or help on issues relating to drugs or alcohol.

**Call 0800 6 33 55 88**

NHS Direct Wales provides health information on a wide range of conditions, treatments and local health services.

**Call 0845 46 47**

**or visit [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)**