

WHICH PARENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCE YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHOICES ABOUT ALCOHOL?

This fact sheet discusses how parents influence teenagers' decisions regarding alcohol...

Did you know?

- › Research shows that parents are their children's most influential role models when it comes to drinking alcohol. Teenagers aged 11–15 years tend to follow their parents' behaviour when deciding whether to smoke, drink or use marijuana. This influence is strongest before the teenager has tried any of these substances, so parents are an important factor in helping to prevent alcohol or other drug use.
- › Young people prefer their parents to be their main source of information about alcohol and other drugs.

Key facts

- › Parenting styles that involve clear and consistent supervision and discipline, coupled with strong attachment between parents and children, have been shown to shield young people from dangerous risk-taking behaviours. It doesn't guarantee that these teenagers will never drink alcohol, but they are more likely to do so responsibly.
- › The most effective parenting styles are those that encourage positive development in young people. This involves being flexible but firm, maintaining control and discipline while remaining open to communication.
- › Parents are effective when they communicate their expectations clearly, allow for some 'give and take', encourage responsibility, cooperation and self-regulation, and discipline their children using these supportive techniques rather than using punishing techniques.

Special considerations and tips

- › **Be prepared.** You'll need to answer your teenager's questions as they arise, so it's best to keep yourself informed. Find out as much as you can about alcohol and teenagers (see [Fact sheet 1: Alcohol and adolescent development](#), [Fact sheet 3: Standard drinks and low-risk drinking](#) and [Fact sheet 4: Fact or myth?](#)).
- › **Explain the risks, effects and potential harms.** It's important to stick to the facts—don't make it up or exaggerate. Teenagers tend to 'tune out' when they

suspect their parents are using 'scare tactics'.

- › **Think about how much you drink.** As a parent you are an influential role model for your teenager and he or she may be watching what/how much you drink. It is important to show your teenager how to drink responsibly and in moderation (see [Fact Sheet 3: Standard drinks and low-risk drinking](#)).
- › **Be consistent.** Kids can pick up on inconsistencies and contradictions and this may leave them feeling confused about boundaries around alcohol and about alcohol in general. It is important that the messages you (and your partner) are telling your teenager are the same.
- › **Give them good reasons not to drink.** It's important to tell your teenager why you don't want him or her to drink alcohol. Explain the dangerous situations they can get into if they drink, such as accidental injuries, violent behaviours and risky sexual activity. Describe the negative physical effects on their health and appearance, and appeal to their self-image by explaining that alcohol might cause them to do something embarrassing or something they later regret.
- › **Make your position clear.** Setting up and enforcing limits on teenagers is not easy, but adolescents are less likely to drink alcohol if their parents have established clear boundaries. Discuss these boundaries with your teenager. With younger teenagers (aged 12–14) you may want to set the rules and clearly outline the consequences of breaking the rules, what the punishment will be and how it will be carried out.
- › **Assess your communication style.** See [Fact sheet 7: Teenage drinking: Parents' communication style can make a difference](#) for tips on communicating with your teenager.
- › **Assess your parenting style.** Are you being too harsh with your teenager, or does he or she need some boundaries and/or appropriate discipline? All teenagers need to know their boundaries and they need to be able to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy choices when it comes to issues such as alcohol, peer groups, sexual activity and other risky behaviours.

The diagram below offers some tips and strategies for dealing with a typical scenario related to a party that Kim has been invited to. There are three parent responses that correspond to different parenting styles. All of the responses have different considerations that are associated with them.

SCENARIO 1: Kim is 14 years old. She has been invited to her school friend’s party.

Mum and Dad, can I go to Suzy’s party on Saturday night?

Parent 1

Sure, Kim. Enjoy yourself!

Things to consider

- Do you know enough about the party to be confident that Kim will be in a safe environment?
- Taking an interest in your teenager’s social life can help him/her feel comfortable talking to you when things go wrong, or when they need help.

Parent 2

No, you are too young to go to a party on a Saturday night. Besides, we don't even know Suzy's parents.

Things to consider

- How will Kim feel about your instant refusal?
- Would you feel comfortable letting her go to the party if you knew she would be in a safe environment? What would you need to know?
- Consider having a discussion about your concerns. Even if she still doesn't go to the party, Kim may feel better about your refusal if she understands your reasons and if she feels that you have listened to her point of view.

Parent 3

Let’s have a chat about this. What do we know about the party? Is there a written invitation?

Things to consider

- These are great conversation starters—they can help signal to Kim that you are taking her seriously.
- If there is no written invitation, some good questions to ask include: ‘Where is the party being held?’, ‘Who will be attending the party?’, ‘Will alcohol be allowed, or will alcohol be available?’, ‘Will there be parent/adult supervision?’ and ‘Do you need us to come and pick you up?’
- This is a good opportunity to discuss/remind Kim of the limits you have set for her, as well as your family rules and consequences.
- If you are not satisfied with the information you receive about the party, it’s okay to say ‘no’, but make sure you explain your reasons.

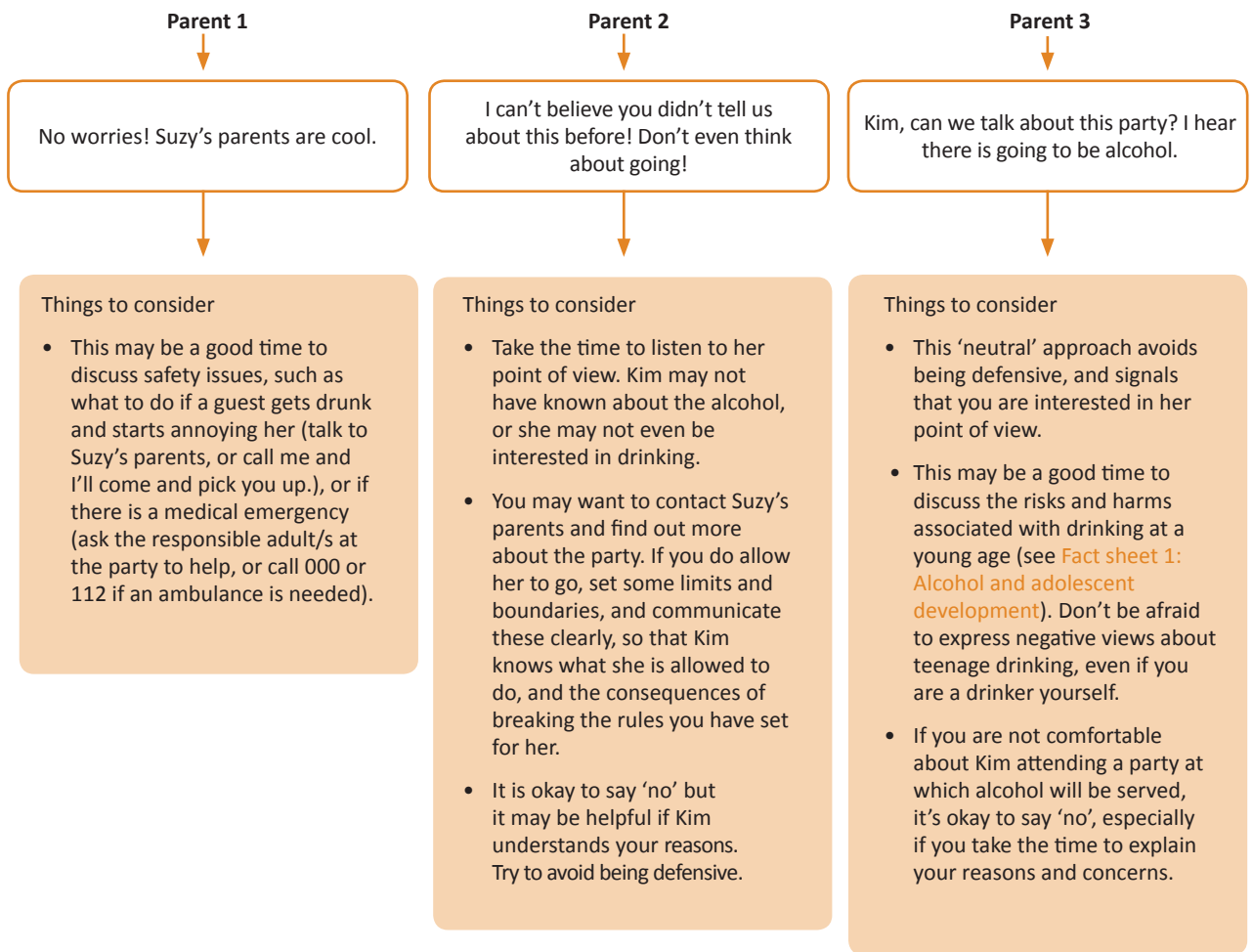
Did you know? From November 2011 new laws on the supply of alcohol to people under 18 years in a private home without parental consent came into effect. These new laws can enforce a fine up to \$7,000 for supplying alcohol to someone under 18 years in a private residence without the consent of a parent or guardian. This law is designed to provide parents with greater confidence and knowledge about how their child is consuming alcohol.

- Here is another diagram that offers tips and strategies for dealing with a typical scenario related to a party that Kim has been invited to. There are three parent responses that correspond to different parenting styles. All of the responses have different considerations that are associated with them.

SCENARIO 2:

Alcohol will be allowed at Suzy’s party.

You’ve agreed to let Kim attend the party, but then you find out that alcohol will be allowed. Suzy’s parents will be supervising the party.



Further information/Where to get help

- For information on the effects of alcohol and other drugs, go to www.druginfo.adf.org.au.
- For tips on communicating with your teenager, see [Fact sheet 7: Teenage drinking: Parents’ communication style can make a difference.](#)
- The Australian Drug Foundation has published a number of fact sheets on teenagers and alcohol. To obtain further information see:
- www.druginfo.adf.org.au or call 1300 85 85 84.