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about
alcohol.ie



Alcohol and Drugs: A Parent's Guide

Practical advice to help
you communicate with
your child about alcohol
and other drugs



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Thanks to our contributors and reviewers:

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REFERENCES

This guide was created using many existing publications and research papers as references.

Additional 'Teen Talk' quotes and inspiration from 'Sharing Experiences & Suggestions around Alcohol & Substance abuse - A guide for parents' by Brian Wall

A full list of references is available on www.askaboutalcohol.ie

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

It's reassuring to know that most young people in Ireland don't abuse alcohol or drugs but, for some, using substances at this time in their lives can give rise to all kinds of problems.

It is internationally recommended that children and young people should not drink or take drugs as their bodies and brains are still developing until early to mid twenties. However, in Ireland despite the legal age for alcohol use being 18 years, the average age for those who do start to experiment with substances is around the age of 15 years. In a pro alcohol environment it can be difficult for parents to prevent children from engaging in this activity. However, the longer that young people can delay drinking and drug use the less likely it is that problems will occur in later life.

Teenagers and young people's attitudes to alcohol and other drugs are influenced by many things - friends, social media, advertising and, not least, the Irish drinking culture. Fortunately, in spite of these many influences, parents remain the single strongest influence on their child's substance use behaviours.

This guide is aimed at parents, guardians and others who care for children. It can help you to understand the risks related to alcohol and drug use in teenagers. It offers you practical advice on how to tackle issues that may arise.

It also gives you tips on how to get the conversation about drugs and alcohol started with your teenager and how you can help them to protect themselves when faced with peer and societal pressure.

This resource developed and published by the HSE Alcohol Programme will be supported by Leaving and Junior Cycle Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) lesson plans in the future.

Further information and resources are available to download on www.askaboutalcohol.ie

QUICK GUIDE:

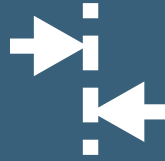
**6 STEPS TO
PROTECTING YOUR
CHILD FROM ALCOHOL
AND OTHER DRUGS**

1.



**Build a
close relationship**

2.



**Set boundaries and
stick to them**

3.



**Know what they're
doing**

4.



**Don't give alcohol to
children under 18**

5.



**If you drink, set a good
example by taking a
low-risk approach**

6.



**Talk openly and honestly
about the risks of using
alcohol and other drugs**



TALKING ABOUT ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

“Start a discussion ... be sure to take
in their perspective. Be open and
don't get angry. Come from a place
of care.”

START YOUNG

Younger children are more likely than teenagers to be open to hearing what you have to say and to accept your rules. It's also easier to talk to your child before they feel the pressure to drink or take drugs. Don't worry if you haven't done this yet, as it's never too late to start the conversation.

PICK THE RIGHT MOMENT

With a younger child, the right moment can often be when they ask a question about alcohol or drugs.

Your teenager may think that they 'know it all', so you may need to wait for an opportunity to talk. For example, if you are watching a TV show that features subtle marketing, drug-taking, drunkenness or dependence, you could ask what they think about it. This approach is probably easier than trying to sit down and have a big talk.

You could also highlight the risks and ways to stay safe if they are going to a party or teenage disco.

If you find out that your child is drinking or taking drugs, this can also be a time to have a chat.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY CHILD ABOUT ALCOHOL AND DRUGS?

IT'S HELPFUL FOR CHILDREN TO KNOW:

- Basic facts about alcohol and other drugs.
- Why they should avoid drugs and alcohol, especially while their bodies and brains are still developing.
- Ways to avoid harm.
- Ways to enjoy themselves and cope with life's ups and downs without using alcohol and other drugs.

MAKE IT A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION

Getting your child's point of view is an important part of any conversation about alcohol or drugs. Sometimes teenagers don't feel heard - listen carefully to find out what they know, what's happening with their friends and how they feel about alcohol and drugs. That way you can find out how best to support them.

TEEN TALK

"Support them to make healthier choices. Educate them on drugs and alcohol."

BE REALISTIC ABOUT THE DANGERS

Your child needs to know the risks linked to alcohol and drugs. At the same time, if you over-exaggerate the risks, they may dismiss what you are saying.

Many young people drink and try drugs without suffering any serious harm. It's good to acknowledge this, as well as pointing out the very real and sometimes tragic consequences of drinking alcohol and drug-taking.

TEEN TALK

"Tell them stories about you or friends ... tell them the dangers, but [don't] make them feel you're lecturing them."

HOW TO CHALLENGE MARKETING AND MEDIA MESSAGES



In Ireland, our drinking culture seems to be part of everyday life, and drink and drugs are more available and affordable than ever.

Movies and TV shows, advertising and sports sponsorship tend to ignore the harm alcohol and drugs can do and just focus on the fun, positive things.

Research shows that when children view alcohol and drugs in a positive way, they are more likely to try them.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Try to limit your child's time online and avoid them watching 18 rated films and shows:** The more children are exposed to positive messages about drugs and alcohol, the bigger the effect it has on them.
- **Draw their attention to the way alcohol and drugs are shown:** Do they think it influences them? Do they recognise product placement in TV shows and movies? Do they agree with alcohol sponsorship? Do they think showing young people getting high or getting drunk is sending a bad message?
- **Ask them if they feel that alcohol ads appeal to young people:** You could talk about where an alcohol company is sponsoring a sports competition or ask them if they ever see alcohol ads when they're online and how they feel about them.
- **Talk about the downsides of alcohol and drugs:** Chat about news stories that show the harm alcohol and drugs can cause. For example when someone dies after drinking or taking drugs. Point out times where alcohol spoils someone's fun or gets them into trouble.

TEEN TALK

"My Dad drinks 10 pints on a Saturday night - so, he can hardly lecture me"

HOW TO SET A GOOD EXAMPLE



Research shows the way parents drink and their attitudes to alcohol are one of the biggest influences on how their children drink.

If we overdo things ourselves, give in to pressure to drink from others or use alcohol or drugs to unwind, it's difficult to expect different behaviour from our children.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Be aware of low-risk drinking guidelines (see below for details).
- Keep your drinking or drug-taking away from your child.
- Avoid drinking at home before going out socially.
- Don't let them see you drunk.
- Be aware of the messages you are giving about alcohol and drugs - don't laugh about drunken exploits and hangovers in front of them or say things that reinforce the idea that drinking or taking drugs is the best way to relax, handle stress, to take time out or enjoy yourself. For example, *"I need a drink after the day I've had"*.
- Try to protect children from older siblings' or other parent's pattern of harmful alcohol use.
- Try to cut down or seek help if you worry about your own pattern of drinking or drug use.
- Get informed - be aware of low risk drinking guidelines (see below) and other alcohol and drug issues on askaboutalcohol.ie and drugs.ie.



“Hangovers, getting sick ... falling and hurting yourself ... embarrassing yourself ... saying things you would never say sober, making terrible decisions.”

A young man with short, light-colored hair is shown in profile, looking towards the left. He is wearing a dark-colored hoodie. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple color. In the upper right quadrant, there is a dark blue rectangular box containing the text "RISKS AND PROBLEMS" in white, bold, uppercase letters.

RISKS AND PROBLEMS

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

The risks of alcohol and drugs are very real. Three out of four young people in our survey answered that they or their friends had been hurt or done something they regretted due to drink or drugs.

RISKS INCLUDE:

- Anti-social behaviour, like vandalism and fighting
- Accidents and injuries
- Alcohol poisoning, drug overdose and bad reactions to a drug
- Risky sexual behaviour
- Getting in trouble with the Gardaí and or having a criminal record
- Doing badly at school
- Problems with family and friends
- Anxiety and low mood
- Self-harm and suicide

TEEN TALK

"I've seen people with alcohol poisoning, people blacking out, people seriously harming themselves, people having horrible comedowns."

REMEMBER LEGAL DOESN'T MEAN SAFE

Alcohol kills more people than all other drugs put together. Legal over-the-counter and prescription medicines can be abused too.

LONGER TERM RISKS:

- Poor mental health, for example, depression and anxiety
- Learning difficulties, memory problems, lack of concentration
- Health problems like cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, liver damage
- Later drug and alcohol problems, like dependence
- Future regret and loss at not having advanced further in your personal life or studies as you had hoped due to your problem drug/ alcohol use
- Being photographed when drunk and the consequences of these images appearing on social media
- Anxiety or trauma from an alcohol or drug-related incident
- Failed relationships due to your alcohol/drug related behaviours



For more information on the risks see www.askaboutalcohol.ie and www.drugs.ie

Research shows that the earlier young people get involved with alcohol and drugs, the greater the risks. Help them to avoid alcohol for as long as possible and encourage them not to take drugs.



RESILIENCE, EMOTIONS AND THE TEENAGE BRAIN

“It brings you down, not up.”

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

From the age of 12 until our mid-20's our brains are constantly developing. Using alcohol or drugs at this time can damage the growing brain, causing long-term emotional problems and difficulties with learning, planning and memory.

DEALING WITH EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS AND UPSET

Upsets, disappointments, arguments and broken hearts are just a few of the challenges that young people face. When they rely on alcohol or drugs to get through social situations or cope with tough times, they miss the chance to learn the skills of identifying their emotions, sharing problems and asking for help. These skills can help them to cope better the next time and build their confidence and resilience.

Without these skills, they might also find it harder to cope emotionally later in life and be tempted to turn to a chemical 'quick fix'.

TEEN TALK

"It numbs the bad feelings."

Help your child to understand that using alcohol or drugs to get a short term 'lift' can leave them feeling worse and make it harder to cope the next time. Set a good example in how you cope with difficult situations.

Young people who drink heavily have more depression and anxiety. Alcohol is also linked to self-harm. Cannabis can trigger underlying mental health problems in some people.

TEEN TALK

“Alcohol gave me frequent panic attacks.”

YOUR GUIDE TO RESILIENT KIDS



Resilience is developed when children are guided and supported to know how to manage and cope with situations so that they do not become overwhelmed.

Resilience helps us to cope and ‘bounce back’ from difficult times, recover and move on.

Research has shown that children who are resilient are less likely to be involved in problem alcohol or other drug use. They tend to have better self-esteem, do better in school and have better relationships.

SKILLS TO BUILD RESILIENCE

- **Being aware of your feelings is really important**

Strong feelings can be overwhelming for young people. Anxiety or sadness leave them feeling powerless. Hurt and resentment can make them feel angry or even violent.

- **Help your child by asking them how they feel regularly and help them to recognise their feelings**

“You seem a bit grumpy. Are you upset about the teacher blaming you?” “How are you feeling about your friend leaving?” “Are you feeling low?” “You must have felt really hurt when that happened.” “Did that make you feel angry?”

- **Learning to recognise and name our feelings is a skill we can learn**

This can help us to manage our emotions better.

- **Understand problems**
This means taking some time to accurately get to the bottom of what is causing a problem. It makes it easier to find a solution, accept things we can't change and avoid blaming ourselves.
- **Give yourself thinking time - really slow down**
Don't act on impulse. Practise thinking about your options and what might happen as a result of each choice before you act. Encourage your child to do the same. Then, when you, or they, need to, you will be able to take that time to think.
- **Show empathy**
Empathy is understanding what it is like to be in someone else's shoes. Encourage your child to think about how other people might be feeling or why they are behaving in a certain way.
- **Believe in their ability**
Show your child you have faith in their ability to get through difficult times and remind them of their strengths. Support them to solve their own problems and to be successful, rather than doing things for them. Praise them when they do well.
- **Stay hopeful (optimistic)**
Being optimistic doesn't mean being blind to reality or pretending things are different from how they really are. It means finding a way to be hopeful and look for positives. Remind your child that difficult times will pass and that sometimes when things go wrong or don't go to plan, something good and unexpected can happen.
- **Ask for help**
Asking for what we want or need, or being able to say how we are feeling, and why, are powerful skills. Emphasise how important it is for your child to tell someone and get help if they feel they're not coping. Advise them to talk to a friend or trusted adult, if they don't want to talk to you. You could also let them know about some of the places they can go to for help listed in the back of this booklet.

STAYING HAPPY AND HEALTHY: Encourage them to do things that help them to feel good and cope better, like taking exercise, getting enough sleep, eating well, having time to relax and enjoy themselves and having good relationships with friends and family.

STAYING CLOSE TO YOUR CHILD

“ Just talk to them and make sure everything is OK. Support. Support. Support.”

HELP! HE WON'T TALK TO ME



My son never talks to me and closes up when I ask about school or his friends. I feel like the only communication we have is me nagging him and I worry I won't know if he's having problems.

It can be hurtful when your once-chatty child won't talk to you and you may worry about how they're feeling or what they're doing. It can be hard to find the balance between respecting their space and keeping communication open.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Accept that things have changed**

It may make you feel a little rejected if a child no longer wants to confide in you. But a life and identity separate from parents are vital parts of healthy teen development. Try to see the positives in the fact your child is becoming independent.

TEEN TALK

"Just really be there for them."

- **Start with small talk**

If the best you get from your teenager is an eye roll or a few grunts, then trying to chat about 'big' things like alcohol or drugs probably feels very difficult. It can be hard if you're worried, but you might need to take a step back and work on chatting about small things first.

Take an interest in what they're interested in, even if you find it boring. Ask about how their football team is doing, ask their opinion on news stories that they might be interested in, or find out about a book they're reading or a computer game they're playing. Try to be interesting company and share jokes or things you've done or read.

- **Watch and wait**

A teen may only want to talk for 5 minutes a day, and chances are it won't be the time that suits you best. They may wander into the kitchen while you're making dinner, or chat in the car or while watching TV. If you can predict when they're most chatty, try hard to be around at that time. Or make some space for a conversation to start – offer lifts so that you will have time in the car together, stay in the same room, take them shopping or ask them to help you with something like walking the dog or tidying up after dinner.

- **Learn to really listen**

If your child talks to you, give your full attention and use active listening, so they're more likely to do it again! See our active listening guide on page 28.

A graphic consisting of a pink background with a white speech bubble shape. Inside the speech bubble, the words "TEEN TALK" are written in white, bold, uppercase letters. The speech bubble is tilted slightly to the right.

TEEN TALK

A graphic featuring a large, stylized speech bubble with a pink-to-purple gradient. The text "Try to put yourself in the situation of the child." is written inside the bubble in white, bold, sans-serif font. The bubble has a soft shadow and is set against a white background.

“Try to put yourself in the situation of the child.”

YOUR GUIDE TO ACTIVE LISTENING



Active listening can encourage your child to talk and express their feelings. It can also help them to feel respected and valued, to know that you want to hear what they have to say. It may feel a bit weird at first, but keep practising and it should get easier. Some of the main tips are:

ASK OPEN QUESTIONS

This means questions that start with *'how'*, *'when'*, *'what'*, *'who'* or *'why'* Questions that don't have a *'yes'* or *'no'* answer.

Sometimes *'why?'* can make a teen feel they are being judged, which can shut down a conversation - so use it wisely!

Don't interrupt to ask questions.

Listen until you're sure they have finished what they were saying.

SUMMARISE

Summarise what you have understood: *"So you're saying that you feel like an outsider when everyone else but you is drinking?"* *"You feel like cannabis is a safe drug?"*

REFLECT

Just repeating a word or phrase can encourage them to carry on talking: *"Yes, it is difficult."*

CLARIFY

Ask for more details: *"Tell me more about that"*, *"How exactly did that happen?"*

GIVE WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

"Go on", *"Ah, I see"*, *"Yes, I know what you mean."*

LEAVE QUIET MOMENTS

Don't feel you have to fill the silence. Staying quiet while keeping your attention on them can encourage them to say something else.

REACT

Show that you've understood how they are feeling: *"That's really hard"*, *"You must have felt terrible"*, *"It must be very difficult to cope with that"*. Listening out for the emotion and feeling behind what they say is as important as the facts they state.

USE NON-VERBAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Smiling, nodding, responding to their feelings with facial expressions or mirroring their facial expressions and keeping eye contact shows that they have your full attention.

YOUR GUIDE TO STAYING CLOSE TO YOUR CHILD



Research shows that having a strong bond with their parents is one of the things that protects kids when it comes to alcohol and drugs. It can be tough to find ways to stay close to your child at a time when it may feel like they're pushing you away, but feeling loved and connected can make a big difference to them.

TEEN TALK

"My parents ... gave me space to speak."

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Take – and make – your chances to talk**
Your child may only want to chat for a few minutes a day. If your child starts chatting, drop everything and make the most of the moment to listen!

- **Listen more than you talk**

Spend more time trying to understand their world and their feelings than offering your opinions or advice.

- **Spend time with them**

Try and spend at least a few minutes alone with your child every day. Try find some activity you can do together, or even just be in the same room while they are watching TV or playing a computer game.

Don't give up on family time as your child gets older. Keep up routines, family outings and activities, and let your child know you expect them to join in.

- **Be loving**

Say hello with a smile, go to the door to say goodbye when they leave, say goodnight and good morning. Touch them on the arm and ask for a kiss or a hug when you can. You might get a hard stare 9 times out of 10, but it's keeping the door open for them to come to you at times when they're feeling vulnerable. Be kind and caring, sympathise when things go wrong, without offering a solution or an opinion. These little things can build up your relationship and make your child feel more secure.

- **Protect your relationship**

Try not to let disagreements and arguments damage your relationship or let the negatives outweigh the positive. Compensate if you've fallen out by adding something positive – spend good time with them, bring them a snack or drink, smile or make physical contact like a pat or a hug. Forgive and forget: reach out after an argument and try and find out if something is bothering them.

- **Be the parent**

Being close to your child doesn't mean spoiling them or giving in on important issues. As a parent, there are times when you will have to make decisions that your child doesn't like. But attempting to parent when your relationship is damaged is like pushing a boulder uphill. Kill them with kindness when you can and praise them when they're being good and the rest should be a lot easier.

TEEN TALK

“I have a very close relationship with my mam ... That bond has always made me think, ‘Would she be happy with what I am doing?’”

We all love our children, but it’s important to find ways to show them, so that they really feel loved.



SETTING BOUNDARIES

“ I was happy they cared and tried to protect me.”

HELP! TRYING TO SET BOUNDARIES ALWAYS ENDS IN AN ARGUMENT



My son and I are constantly at war. I'm not happy with him going out so much, but I just feel tired of fighting all the time, so I let it go.

If you and your child have a difficult relationship, trying to lay down the law can be a challenge.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Work on your relationship**

If they see you as being on their side – someone who ‘has their back’ – they’re more likely to listen to what you have to say.

- **Learn how to handle conflict**

Get some advice on how to deal with arguments and conflicts so that they don’t get out of hand.

- **Give a little, but don’t give up**

Give your child choices and freedom wherever you can. It will boost their self-esteem and confidence if they know you trust them. But don’t turn a blind eye or give in to keep the peace where safety is concerned.

- **Have faith in yourself**

Teenagers can put up a good argument, but you still have the right to set the rules and say that you don’t want them to drink or take drugs. Knowing that they may bend the rules doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have any. See Handling resistance, page 42.

TEEN TALK

“Lack of rules made me feel unsafe and unsure.”

YOUR GUIDE TO SETTING BOUNDARIES



Having rules can help your child to

- Avoid feeling under too much pressure from friends
- Avoid situations they can't handle or later regret
- Feel safer
- Feel loved

While they may complain, clear, fair rules let your child know where they stand and show you care enough to protect them.

TEEN TALK

"I stuck by [the rules] because I thought they were fair."

START EARLY

To help avoid conflict, make sure your child knows what is allowed and what's not allowed before a problem comes up. For example, you could tell a child of 11 or 12:

- They can go only to the local disco once they get to secondary school.
- When they are older they won't be allowed to go to parties unless you talk with the parent first.
- They will not be allowed to stay out past midnight until they are 16.

BE CLEAR WHAT IS RIGHT FOR YOUR FAMILY

Every family has its own values and beliefs. What's right for one family may not be right for yours. Decide what's OK and what's not OK in your family and let your child know. **If there are two parents or guardians in the house, make sure to have a united voice.**

TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU EXPECT

Let your child know that you want them to be free to socialise and become independent, but that having more freedom depends on them proving they are responsible enough to keep themselves safe. This means sticking by the rules.

EXPLAIN WHY YOU NEED THE RULES

In every family and household there are rules. Explain why you need some rules about alcohol and drugs to help your child see that you care about their well-being and understand the issues from your perspective. Sharing some of the risks may help. When you have this discussion, listen to your child's opinions, too, without interrupting.

TRY TO INVOLVE YOUR CHILD IN SETTING THE RULES

Children are more likely to stick to rules if they're involved and agree to them. You could say, "I know that some of your friends are going to be drinking at the party. I'm not happy about you drinking at your age, so I want to chat to you about how we are going to handle this." Listen to their opinions and objections. Be prepared to negotiate and give them some of what they want, if possible, such as staying out slightly later.

TEEN TALK

"Talk about it and ask questions and come up with a plan."

MAKE SURE THEY UNDERSTAND THE RULES

If the rules aren't clear, it's harder for a child to stick to them. For example, have a set time they are expected in at each evening.

AGREE WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE RULES ARE BROKEN

Try to make the consequences fair. For example:

- **Late home?**
They will have to come home earlier the next time until they get your trust.
- **Don't answer their phone when they are out?**
They have to stay at home for a time.
- **Buy alcohol?**
They don't get money for a time.

MAKE SURE CONSEQUENCES HAPPEN IF THE RULES ARE BROKEN

Rules without consequences don't work. Consequences don't need to be severe – they just need to happen! Don't give in or make an exception. If you let things go once, it's much harder to try and make rules work in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGE GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Make sure to notice and thank them if they stick to the rules or help to keep their friends safe. You could make a point of rewarding their good behaviour with more freedom. *“Yes OK, you can stay out later. You did stick to the rules last time, so I know I can trust you.”*

HOW TO BE THE PARENT



There's strong evidence that knowing what your child is doing and having rules to prevent underage drinking and drug taking are important in keeping them safe.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Get to know their friends and find out who they will be with while they are out.
- Check that they are where they say they are. Call the parents if they are sleeping over or going to a party.
- Insist they keep their phone on and charged.
- Watch how much money they have and be aware how they are spending it.
- Look for signs that they may be drinking like taking rucksacks to parties or drink going missing from your home.
- Keep alcohol and medicines locked up.
- Be aware of the effects and signs of using different drugs. See page 55 for more information.

TEEN TALK

"Parents should protect their children."

BE BRAVE

Keeping a close eye on your child and setting rules is the difficult choice. You may even feel it's making things worse. If your child gets upset with you for 'interfering' or embarrassing them, you may be tempted to let things go and avoid an argument.

But having firm but fair rules to protect your child is the right choice. Have faith in yourself. Even if they protest or get angry, deep down no child is unhappy to know that their parents care enough to try to protect them.

YOUR GUIDE TO PARTIES AND DISCOS



- **Take time to decide if you are happy for your child to go to a party or disco.**
You don't need to answer straight away. Contact the host parents or organisers to check they will be supervised and if alcohol will be available. Most well-known youth organisations like Foróige, the GAA, Scouting Ireland and No Name! Club have strict rules to keep their events well supervised and free from alcohol.
- **If you don't want your child to drink alcohol at a party, tell the host parents.**
Remember that it is illegal for another adult to give your child drink in their house without your permission.
- **Drop your child at the party or disco and wait until they have gone inside.**
This can avoid pre-drinking or your child ending up somewhere different to the place you have agreed. Some teenagers drink before they go into the local disco.

TEEN TALK

"If I did not come home by a certain time they checked in with me, which was annoying but ... I knew my parents cared."

- **Don't give them alcohol to take to a party.**
If you think they will buy drink, don't give them money.
- **Collect your child or arrange for another trusted parent to collect them.**
If their rules or collection times are different to yours, make your own arrangements.

For older children, our skills section on page 50 gives you some advice for keeping them safe around alcohol and drugs when they're socialising.

- **If your child breaks the rules, make sure there are consequences to help them the next time.**

For example, if they don't leave at the agreed time, go inside to collect them. They may be embarrassed, but they probably won't be late the next time!

- **Talk to other parents about breaking rules.**

Set some rules together. Agree with other parents that you will tell each other if one child is late or has drunk alcohol. Let your child know this will happen.

- **Avoid sleepovers after parties.**

If they come home, you can check they are OK.

TEEN TALK

"I often stayed at a friend's house to hide the fact I'd been drinking"

- **Be available to collect them early, even if they had planned to stay overnight with a friend.**

It's reassuring for your child to know that they can ring you at any time to be collected. Let them know that you will help them out no matter what, even if they have broken the rules.

- **Greet your child when they come home.**

It's easy for teenagers to hide the fact that they have been drinking by simply popping their head into their parents' bedroom to say they are home. Stay up or get up so that you can check they are OK.

TEEN TALK

"I sometimes think parents are too soft."

YOUR GUIDE TO PARTIES AT YOUR HOME



- **Don't feel you have to say yes.**
If you don't feel comfortable, suggest alternatives like a trip to the cinema, a shopping trip with friends or an activity at home.
- **Find out who they want to invite.**
It's easier to manage if you know the people who are being invited, and ideally their parents. If you know one of the friends has a reputation for drinking, drugs or making trouble, don't be afraid to say no to them.
- **Check for guests bringing drink.**
If you have told your child that alcohol is not allowed at their party, make sure their friends don't bring drink into the house. Greet the guests at the door and look out for people bringing bags or rucksacks.
- **Let parents know if alcohol will be served.**
If alcohol is allowed, you should let the other parents know. It's illegal to give alcohol to under 18's without their parents' permission.
- **Let parents know the times their child will be at your house.**
Tell other parents when the party starts, and finishes, so that they know when to expect their child home. Offer to text them to let them know when their child arrives or leaves.
- **Don't cover up for other people's children.**
Make sure your child and their friends know that if they get drunk or take drugs, you will have to let their parents know.

YOUR GUIDE TO HANDLING RESISTANCE



Faced with a determined teenager, it can be easy to back down. Have your answers ready. Being prepared can help you to stay strong.

- **“Everyone else is allowed to go.”**
I know you don’t want to feel the odd one out, but it’s my job to do what I think is best. I’m not happy about you being there with no adults when people are going to be drinking.
- **“You don’t need to worry. I can look after myself, I’m not stupid.”**
I know you’re not stupid. That’s why I’m letting you go. But if you want that freedom, you have to stay in contact with me so I know that you’re safe.
- **“Everyone else will be bringing a few cans.”**
I know you feel left out, but you can still have a good time without drinking. I’m not going to give you alcohol while you’re underage.
- **“You don’t understand. It’s just a bit of fun.”**
I do understand why you want to drink. And I know it can be fun. Kids get hurt and injured every day and do things they regret when they’re drunk. I care about you and I’m not going to put you in that position. You can have fun without alcohol.
- **“You drink. Why are you trying to stop me?”**
You can drink when you’re older. But your brain is still developing, and alcohol messes with that. And it’s unhealthy to start drinking young. I want you to wait as long as possible.
- **“I hate you!”**
I can see why you feel that way. It would be easier for me to give in. But I care about you and I’m going to do what I think is best for you. Even if it makes you unhappy right now.

While it's OK to negotiate, don't give in to pressure. Listen to any objections, but once you have made your mind up, don't get drawn into any more discussion. Just repeat your position and let them deal with it.

HELP! ALL HER FRIENDS ARE ALLOWED



All my daughter's friends are allowed to bring alcohol to parties. I don't want her to drink, but I worry that she will feel bad if she's the odd one out.

For most teenagers, friends are a big part of their life. Evidence shows that kids are more likely to drink or take drugs if their friends do.

It's a common belief that giving your child a small amount of alcohol can help them to drink more responsibly. However, the research says giving your child alcohol can mean they drink more and more harmfully. The earlier young people start to drink, the more likely they are to develop problems with alcohol later on.

TEEN TALK

"Teach them ... they can absolutely have fun at a party with drunk people without being drunk."

Lots of young people in our survey suggested giving a non-alcoholic drink disguised as alcohol, to help a teenager who is finding it hard to deal with peer pressure.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Be understanding about peer pressure**
It's hard to deal with the pressure to fit in and drink, even for us adults!
- **Be there for her**
Teenagers are under a lot of pressure and can feel very vulnerable. Your daughter needs the security of knowing you're on her side and want to keep her safe.
- **Talk to her friends' parents**
If you're worried, it can help to talk to friends' parents or to the school. If other parents are worried too, see if you can set some rules together. This can help to avoid the argument '*Everyone else is allowed...*' There may also be legal issues that other parents should know about, for example, if a parent is supplying alcohol or a child is supplying drugs to the group. See page 60 for more about the law.
- **Let her friends know what your rules are**
Though she might be mortified, it can reduce pressure on your child if her friends know your rules. For example:
 - She has a fixed time to be home
 - You will call their friends' parents if necessary
 - Friends will not be allowed to bring alcohol into your house

TEEN TALK

"Talk to your kid and find out what they want ... Teach them to say no to things they're not comfortable with."

TEEN TALK

“Tell them to be their own person ... nobody’s going to remember in a week’s time that you were the one not drinking at the party.”

HANDLING ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

**“ Make it clear that you are ...
there to support them and care about
their health and wellbeing more than
anything else.”**

HELP! MY CHILD GOT REALLY DRUNK



My daughter went to a school disco and I was called to come and collect her, she was in such a state. I just don't know the best way to handle it.

While you might have been upset to see your daughter drunk, try to put your emotions aside and use the opportunity to have a talk about alcohol.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Listen

Wait until she has sobered up and you are both calm. Use active listening (see page 28) so you can find out as much as possible about what happened. Think about what your child needs to know so that it doesn't happen again. For example:

- Was she aware of how much she was drinking?
- Did she drink before she left the house?
- Did she feel anxious or under pressure?
- Had she planned to get drunk?
- Where did she get the alcohol?
- Was she in any risky situations, for example, walking on dark roads, at risk of being taken advantage of sexually?
- Did it ruin her night?

Help her learn

Without overwhelming her, give her some information, based on what she tells you. You could talk about:

- The amount of alcohol in different drinks and how it's dangerous to mix drinks, or drink very quickly.
- How too much alcohol in the blood stream shuts down the central nervous system, and can lead to unconsciousness and even death.
- The risks of accidents and injuries.
- How being out of control can leave her vulnerable to behaving in a way she will regret – for example getting in trouble with the law, falling out with people, or getting intimate when she hadn't planned to.

If she has broken the rules, give a consequence

This doesn't mean blaming her, but instead giving a clear message that you don't approve of drinking underage and the very good reasons why. Give a consequence, such as taking her phone, reducing pocket money, expecting her home at an earlier time in future, or grounding her for a couple of weeks.

It might be easier to ignore the drinking, or even laugh it off. But alcohol is risky, especially for teenagers.

Stop it happening again

Show your daughter that you will put rules in place to stop this happening again. This doesn't mean locking her in her room, but taking steps so that you can let her go out without worrying about this happening again. Make sure she knows that you're doing this because you care about her and want to keep her safe. See page 35 for some hints.

TEEN TALK

"Talk to them about the experience. Be supportive and don't give out – it doesn't help."

TIPS FOR SAFER SOCIALISING



PREPARE THEM FOR PEER PRESSURE

- Ask them how they feel about drinking / taking drugs and if they feel pressured to join in. Warn them not to tease or pressure people who aren't joining in and not to let their friends do this either.
- Let them know that they can say no and give them reasons:
"I can't go home drunk, my parents would kill me."
"I have to get up early tomorrow for training."
"Nah I prefer to stay sober."
"No I'm scared to take it. I don't like the idea of being out of control."
"It makes me feel ill – I'll enjoy the night more without it."
"I'm on antibiotics."
- Reassure them that it's sometimes better to avoid a situation where they will be under a lot of pressure or where things might get out of control because of alcohol or drugs.

JUDGING ALCOHOL INTAKE

Talk to your kids about:

- What a standard drink is (a drink containing 10g of pure alcohol). Show them what a standard drink is and why there is a limit.
- How different drinks have different strengths – for example, some beers can contain twice the amount of alcohol as others. Show them the % alcohol content on drinks' labels so they understand.
- How it's hard to judge the amount of alcohol in mixed drinks and drinks that other people give to them.
- How even a small number of standard drinks can affect their judgement and explain what will happen as the level of alcohol in their blood rises, especially if they drink a lot of alcohol in a short space of time.
- The danger of drinking spirits and strong beers, where a small amount contains the same amount of alcohol as a much bigger drink of beer or cider.
- The danger of sweet-tasting drinks like alcopops, which don't taste of alcohol and are to easy drink.

LOOKING AFTER THEIR MATES

Talk to them about the risks and give them tips to help keep their friends safe. Talking about ‘other people’ helps to make your child aware of their own safety too. You could tell them:

“Do you know what to do if one of your friends drinks too much? I didn’t realise but apparently it can be really dangerous to let them sleep it off.”

“Keep an eye on your friends at the party– make sure they don’t do anything they’ll regret.”

“If you see one of your friends getting out of control, try and make sure they don’t drink any more alcohol and give them a soft drink – otherwise they might go unconscious.”

“Don’t let your friends take any risks or go off on their own if they’re drunk or high – I heard about some lads who went swimming after drinking and one of them drowned.”

At the same time, let them know they don’t need to ‘fix’ a friend’s problems. This is too much responsibility for a teenager. If they feel a friend is in trouble, they should always look for help from an adult.

- Help them to understand about alcohol poisoning and drug effects and what to do. Teenagers need to know that drinking black coffee, getting fresh air, getting or taking cold showers won’t help once a drug is in the bloodstream.
- Encourage them to call you or get medical help if they are worried about someone or something goes wrong. Explain that the consequences of not getting help can be very serious and they shouldn’t worry about getting into trouble.

It can make a teenager feel valued and behave well if they know you trust them to do the right thing.

GETTING HOME SAFELY

- Be available to pick them up or insist on picking them up, depending on their age, or pre-book a taxi at the time they are due to leave.

- Let them know that mixing drugs (including alcohol) with other drugs (including prescription medicines) can have unpredictable or dangerous effects. Mixing prescription drugs with other drugs (including alcohol) can stop a prescription medication from working.
- Warn them not to drive after drinking or taking drugs and never to take a lift with someone who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Have a back-up plan for when a designated driver ends up drinking or taking drugs.
- Tell them never to leave a party or club alone or to let their friends go off alone.
- Advise them to stay in groups of three or more.
- Let them know the dangers of walking home under the influence, especially on poorly lit roads.

MIXING DRINK / DRUGS

Let them know that mixing drugs, including alcohol, with other drugs including prescription medicines, can have unpredictable or dangerous effects. For example, alcohol and ecstasy together can increase the risk of dangerous dehydration. Mixing drugs can also stop a prescription drug from working. If you want to know more see www.askaboutalcohol.ie or www.drugs.ie

SPIKED DRINKS

Warn them:

- Not to leave a drink where it could be spiked (more alcohol or drugs added).
- To watch how much they drink so that they will notice anyone messing with their drink or if they start to feel weird.
- Not to share or steal drinks, or take drinks from strangers.
- To get help straight away if they feel strange and suspect their drink has been spiked.
- Never to leave a friend who is acting strangely, in case their drink has been spiked.

STAYING SAFE SEXUALLY

- Help your child to understand that getting 'out of it' means they may not be able to judge how safe a situation is or 'read' the other person's feelings. They may also do something they regret later.

- Make sure they keep an eye on their friends and intervene if they see them in a risky situation.
- Advise them that even if someone seems willing to get intimate, they may not know what they are doing or they may not be able to say 'no' or 'stop' if they have taken drugs or too much alcohol.
- Let them know you'll be there for them if anything happens, that they can tell you and they won't get into trouble.

HELP! I THINK MY SON IS TAKING DRUGS



I'm really worried about my son. I know some of his friends take drugs and lately his mood has been awful and he's not doing well at school.

This can be a parents worst nightmare. But try not to panic.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Stay calm**
First of all, try to stay calm. Getting angry or emotional probably won't help. Take some time to get more information and plan how you want to deal with the problem. It may help to remember that many young people experiment with drugs and come through the other side.
- **Inform yourself**
Be sure there is a problem and find out what they are taking. You may need to keep a close eye on them for a little while to be sure. Some of the signs of drug use like moodiness or losing interest in hobbies are normal for teenagers.
- **Find out why**
Try to understand why your child is using drugs. The best way to help depends on the type of drug and how they are using it:
 - If it's recreational use with friends, you may need to keep a closer eye on them and limit their freedom.
 - If they are using substances to cope with stress or problems, try to get to the bottom of what's bothering them and support them to cope in a healthier way.
 - If you feel they may be dependent, bring them to your GP and learn about how to support them, or contact the HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline.

Get some professional advice if you don't feel you can manage alone

- **Talk to them**

- Find a time when you won't be distracted or interrupted and you are both calm.
- Listen to them and get as much information as possible. Try not to give your opinion, get angry or interrupt, as this may shut down the conversation.
- Don't be afraid to take some time, especially if you are feeling very emotional or overwhelmed: "OK. I need to think about this and I'll talk to you about it tomorrow." That way you can get more information, advice and support, from a friend or professional.

- **Don't ignore it**

Things are not going to get better if you turn a blind eye, especially if they are using alcohol or drugs to cope with a problem or they are at risk of dependence.

Your child may not want to talk, may get aggressive or just deny the problem. It may take a little time to get through to them and you may need to get extra help or advice, but don't give up.



For more information see www.drugs.ie

YOUR GUIDE TO RECOGNISING DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE



It can be really frightening to see your child under the influence of drink or drugs. But most times kids will recover, perhaps a bit wiser than before. Knowing what to do can give you confidence that you can look after them and will help you to stay calm.

GENERAL TIPS

- Stay calm and try not to panic.
- Gently reassure them and try and keep their surroundings quiet.
- Try to find out what they have taken - remember that they may have taken drink and drugs, so don't assume it's one or the other.
- Stay with them. Don't leave a very drunk person to '*sleep it off*'. Blood alcohol can carry on rising for a time after a person stops drinking, so things may get worse.
- Keep checking on them when they feel better.
- Call the doctor or an ambulance on 999 or 112 if you're worried.
- Don't try and discuss their drink or drug use while they are under the influence. Wait until they have recovered and you feel calm and ready to talk about things.

SIGNS OF ALCOHOL POISONING

- **Irregular breathing**
- **Unresponsiveness**
- **Pale, clammy and bluish-tinged skin**
- **Low body temperature**
- **Vomiting**
- **Seizures**
- **Confusion or incoherency**
- **Comatose**

SPECIFIC DRUG EFFECTS

If they are tense, 'freaked out' or anxious (speed, cannabis, LSD or magic mushrooms)

- Make sure they are somewhere quiet and calm, away from other people, noise and bright lights.
- Try to calm them. Tell them to breathe slowly and deeply.

If they are very hot or dehydrated (ecstasy and speed)

- Keep them cool. Open a window and take off excess clothing.
- Encourage them to sip water.

If they're drowsy (alcohol, heroin, sniffing, tranquillisers)

- Keep them calm and encourage them to stay relaxed, sitting or lying down.
- Try to keep them awake, but don't slap them, scare them or shout at them and don't give them coffee.

SIGNS OF CANNABIS USE

Behaviour:

- laughing, giggling
- being hungry and eating a lot of snacks after suspected use (known as the munchies)
- being forgetful, distracted or finding it hard to concentrate

Physical:

- bloodshot eyes
- smell of smoke

Other signs:

- cigarette rolling papers ('skins')
- torn bits of cardboard from cigarette packets, rolled up to make a filter
- clean cigarette filters left over from removing the tobacco for a 'joint'
- bits of loose tobacco
- small pipes

SIGNS OF SOLVENT USE (FOR EXAMPLE GLUE SNIFFING)

Behaviour:

- not paying attention
- being clumsy or irritable
- acting drunk
- slurred speech

Physical:

- smell of chemicals.
- spots or rash around the mouth

Other signs:

- empty containers like aerosol cans or bottles of glue or gas
- rags or plastic bags stained or smelling of chemicals
- paint stains on face, hands, or clothing

SIGNS OF STIMULANT USE (COCAINE, SPEED)

Behaviour:

- hyperactive
- talking non-stop
- acting very confident or arrogant
- being hyperactive or full of energy
- excessive tiredness or very low mood (day after suspected use)
- not eating much
- sucking lollipops or chewing gum (to ease the urge to grind teeth with ecstasy) or drinking a lot of water (ecstasy)

Physical:

- runny or itchy nose
- white powder around the nose (cocaine)
- large, dilated pupils
- pulling faces, grinding jaws
- sweating
- dry mouth or white spit (ecstasy)

Other signs:

- small (3cm) plastic 'jiffy bags' that powders or pills may be sold in

SIGNS OF HEROIN AND OTHER OPIATE USE

Physical:

- very small pupils, like dots
- glassy eyed look
- being very drowsy or falling asleep unexpectedly
- slurred or slow speech
- shallow breathing
- itching and scratching
- lines on the arms (track marks) or other parts of the body from injecting heroin

Other signs:

- burnt tinfoil, spoons or needles (heroin)
- empty pill packets (prescription drugs)
- prescription drugs going missing
- blood stains on clothes or bloody tissues (heroin injecting)

Remember that if a child is drunk, it may be hard to tell if they've taken other substances.

YOUR GUIDE TO EMERGENCY SITUATIONS



If someone is unresponsive or unconscious or having difficulty breathing

- Call an ambulance on 112/999 and put them in the recovery position.
- Be careful when moving them in case they have needles in their pocket.
- Stay with them.
- If you know what they have taken, tell the medics. Save any pill bottles or other containers for the medics to help them know what they have taken.

HOW DO ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROBLEMS RUN IN FAMILIES?

Problems related to alcohol or drugs use can run in families. There are genes that increase the likelihood of dependence, which can be passed from parents to children.

Having a family history of substance abuse doesn't mean your child will definitely become dependent on alcohol or drugs. Genetic factors only make dependence more likely.

However, genes are not the only things children inherit from their parents. How parents act and how they treat each other and their children has an influence on children growing up. These aspects of family life also affect the risk of a child becoming dependent on alcohol or drugs later in life.

If your child has experienced problems growing up in the family, such as domestic violence, parental substance misuse or mental illness, they may also be more at risk of problems later in life. They may need extra support and protection when it comes to alcohol and drugs, as well as help to deal with any underlying trauma.

It is important to point out to them that regular use of alcohol or drugs to deal with difficult feelings such as shyness, inadequacy, trauma, means that they may be at risk of developing a dependency especially if there is a family history of alcohol or drug problems. Your GP can help you to find support services if your child needs help coping with their feelings.

You may have struggled with drugs or alcohol yourself. You might be in recovery from substance misuse or have suffered because of some else's substance misuse. If this is the case, then discussing your experiences with your teen may help them to understand the human effects of drug and alcohol use.

If drug or alcohol abuse is a problem in your family, be honest about the effects another person's drug or alcohol use has on you and on the people around you.

Children are very sensitive to the family "atmosphere" and may feel the tension or the silence due to a parental drinking/drug problem so it is important to encourage them to speak about it.

Where to get help?

If you need advice about coping with another person's drinking or drug problems see www.askaboutalcohol.ie or www.drugs.ie. There are also useful contacts in the back of this book. You can also call the HSE confidential freephone helpline on 1800 459 459 from Monday to Friday between 9:30 am and 5:30 pm. Email at any time on helpline@hse.ie

ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND THE LAW

It's illegal for under 18s to buy alcohol or to pretend to be 18 to buy it.

Warn your child not to do this, especially if they look older than their friends.

Possessing or supplying drugs is an offence.

This doesn't just mean big-time street dealing. Buying a few pills and selling on to friends is still an offence. Aside from the legal issue, how would your child feel if they gave a friend drugs that caused a bad reaction or made them very ill?

Young people are more likely to get into trouble with the police if they have taken drink or drugs.

In one Irish study, nearly 9 out of 10 young offenders had taken drugs, alcohol or a combination of both.

Lifelong consequences.

Having a criminal record can exclude people from some jobs and, for some offences, prevent them from travelling abroad.

THERE ARE LEGAL ISSUES FOR ADULTS TOO

- It is illegal to buy alcohol for people under the age of 18.
- It's illegal to give alcohol to anyone under the age of 18 in your house unless you have the consent (agreement) of their parents. This means if you provide drink to kids at your house without asking their parents, you are committing an offence.



For more information see www.drugs.ie

ICELAND - A CASE STUDY

In Ireland our drinking culture can make it seem like really tackling harmful youth alcohol use is an uphill battle. It's useful to know, then, that other countries have faced similar issues and significantly reduced the risks to young people from alcohol and drug use.

In Iceland, a collaborative national and community action on teen drinking had great results: The number of teens aged 14-16 who said they had been drunk in the past month fell from 42 in 100 to only 5 in 100 between the late 90's and late 2010's.

Ref: **Substance use prevention for adolescents: the Icelandic Model**

WHAT DID THEY DO?

There was a mixture of **more monitoring** of young people, **more control** of alcohol, **more leisure activities** and sports and **more family time**.

- 14-16 year-olds were not allowed out without an adult after 10pm (12am in summer).
- Parents were expected to help keep the rules and to spend more time with their children.
- Laws were introduced making it more difficult for young people to buy alcohol and tobacco.
- There was a ban on alcohol advertising and sponsorship.
- Each child received a €300 leisure card, to pay for sports and other activities.

As well as the fall in drunkenness, the number of young smokers fell from 23% to 3% and the number who'd tried cannabis fell from 17% to 7%.

The number of young people taking part in sports and 14-16 year olds spending considerable time with their parents doubled.

TEEN TALK

“Try and make sure your child has good friends. Educate them about effects. Don’t be judgemental or you will push your child away. Try to find out why they are doing it, if it’s just for fun or if there’s a deeper problem. Make sure they keep up sports and exercise.”

FURTHER INFORMATION - HELPLINES AND WEBSITES

FURTHER INFORMATION - HELPLINES AND WEBSITES



If you are worried about your own or your child's alcohol or drug use, talk to your GP, the HSE drugs and alcohol helpline, or one of the following organisations:

Drugs and Alcohol Information	HSE DRUGS AND ALCOHOL HELPLINE	Support, information, guidance and referral to anyone with a question or concern related to drug and alcohol use. All calls are confidential.	1800 459 459 helpline@hse.ie
	www.askaboutalcohol.ie	Information on all aspects of alcohol, including risks, support for parents, advice for when alcohol is affecting a family and list of support services.	
	www.drugs.ie	Drug and alcohol information including types of drugs, drug effects, information for parents and where to get help.	
Alcohol Addiction Counsellors of Ireland (ACI)	www.addictioncounsellors.ie	Accrediting body for addiction counsellors who provide services in both public and private services.	01 7979 187 info@addictioncounsellors.ie
Alcohol and Drugs Support	Crosscare Drug and Alcohol Programme (DAP)	DAP provide support and information to anyone concerned about drugs (including alcohol).	01 8360 911 www.crosscare.ie/drug-alcohol-counselling
Talking Services for Young People	Teen Line	Confidential chat for teenagers feeling fed-up, alone, distressed, worried, or who just want to talk to someone.	1800 833 634 www.teenline.ie
	Childline	24 hour free talking helpline and online chat for children up to the age of 18	1800 666 666 or text TALK to 50101 www.childline.ie
Mental Health Support for Young People	Yourmentalhealth.ie	The HSE's online mental health resource	www.yourmentalhealth.ie
Parenting Support	Parent Line	Support, guidance and information on all aspects of being a parent	LoCall 1890 927 277 01 8733 500 www.parentline.ie

No Name! Club

No Name! Club enables young people to organise and enjoy positive alternatives to alcohol and drug-centred activities. It increases awareness of the effects of alcohol and drugs, enabling young people to make informed choices when they are older.

If you are looking for an alternative for your teen and would like to consider No Name! Club, please go to www.nonameclub.ie for further information.

FURTHER INFORMATION - HELPLINES AND WEBSITES

Parenting positively. Helping teenagers to cope with a parent's problem drug or alcohol use: Guide for parents of teenagers who are affected by a parent's drug or alcohol abuse.

Download from www.barnardos.ie

Taking the Lid Off:

Self help booklet for family members living with addiction or problem substance use. Provides information that can help them understand how addiction affects individuals and what is going on in their family.

Download or order from www.ascert.biz

ask
about
alcohol.ie

For further information please visit
www.askaboutalcohol.ie