

INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES REGARDING ADOLESCENCE AND USE OF ALCOHOL

The John XXIII Parent Community in partnership with the College aims to work cohesively to provide our children with the best opportunities to reach their full potential. Together we can help our children and young people to be strong, resilient and empowered individuals.

OUR COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER

Our community is living within a culture in which alcohol is prominent and widely available. This pamphlet aims to help parents understand the current views of why alcohol is not a safe option for adolescents. It also provides some suggestions about how parents can inform their children about alcohol to help reduce the risk of harm to them. Each family is unique and it is important that you adapt the information provided to your own situation.

KEY MESSAGE TO PARENTS

While experimenting with alcohol has in the past been considered normal throughout adolescence, recent research shows this generational attitude needs to change. In 2009, updated drinking guidelines were released by the National Health and Medical Research Council to reduce health risks associated with drinking alcohol. These guidelines are based on the best available evidence.

The Australian Guidelines To Reduce Health Risks From Drinking Alcohol Are: Children under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking and that for this age group, not drinking alcohol is especially important. For young people aged 15-17 years, the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible.

EFFECT ON BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

The longer the human brain can avoid alcohol, the better chance it has to develop its full potential. The brain - in particular the hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex - continues to develop into the early to mid 20's making it vulnerable to the toxic effects of alcohol. Damage to this part of the brain during development can have lifelong consequences for memory, personality and behaviour.

Young brains are more sensitive to the effect of alcohol on the structure and function of the brain and at the same time they are less sensitive to cues that serve to moderate alcohol consumption.

Young people are also generally smaller, having a lower tolerance to alcohol all of which can contribute to a range of short and long term harms, including the potential for serious harm or death due to an alcohol overdose.

FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE DRINKING

- Drinking alcohol is often perceived as “adult behaviour”
- The belief among teenagers that all their peers are drinking. However research shows young people often over-estimate how much their peers are drinking. This is a problem if they try to match this “inflated” perceived level of peer-drinking
- The deliberate marketing of alcohol to a young demographic
- The attitude and example of parents and other significant adults

STRATEGIES TO HELP: WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Parents want to minimise the risks teenagers take, whilst at the same time allowing them the opportunity to develop inner strength and resilience as they achieve independence.

USEFUL WEBSITES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Parenting Adolescents:
www.parentingstrategies.net

Paul Dillon:
www.darta.net.au

McCusker Centre for Action on
Alcohol and Youth
www.mcaay.org.au

Teenage Parties:
www.alcoholthinkagain.com.au

AS PARENTS WE CAN HAVE A DIRECT INFLUENCE ON THE BEHAVIOUR OF OUR CHILDREN BY:

POSITIVE ROLE MODELLING

As a parent you have a major influence on your adolescent child's drinking behaviour. Positive role-modelling is possibly the most important tool you can use to convey your expectations of them regarding alcohol. As an adult if you say "no" to an offer of alcohol you are powerfully illustrating a refusal strategy that they can also use in their own context. You also show that adults can socialise happily and successfully without alcohol. Your best opportunity to influence your adolescent's attitudes and decisions about alcohol is greatest BEFORE they start drinking.

DO NOT SUPPLY ALCOHOL

Parents are a major supply source of alcohol for youth. There is a pervasive myth that it is better for parents to supply alcohol to their child. There is NO evidence that parental supply of alcohol makes the situation better, there is however evidence that it can make things worse.

Research has shown that it is no longer advisable, or acceptable, for adults to introduce supervised drinking by school aged children as a strategy to assist them to become "responsible" adult drinkers.

DISCLAIMER

These guidelines are not intended to reflect all strategies for addressing the challenges of preventing alcohol use among adolescents but are designed to serve as a resource for parents, students and schools. The information contained herein is not intended to replace professional advice, whether medical, legal or other. Each individual situation is different. John XXIII College disclaims liability of any kind resulting from the use of these guidelines.

- Delaying our child's first drink for as long as possible. The longer an adolescent delays alcohol use, the less likely they are to develop problems associated with alcohol.
- Be informed and talk to them about alcohol and the various scenarios they may face. Educating your child about the link between drinking and dangerous behaviours (physical injuries, risk-taking, violence, sexual assaults, drink-driving, suicide and self-injury).
- Emphasise the short-term harms associated with alcohol as these are generally of greater concern to adolescents. For example, alcohol causing them to do something embarrassing that damages their self-esteem, their reputation and/or their friendships. There is also the physical short-term harms through car accidents, falls, alcohol poisoning and the increased likelihood of assaults.
- Instilling values and building trusting relationships which affirm our role and authority.
- Keep an open and safe line of communication it is important to discuss each other's expectations with your adolescent in a non-judgemental and non-threatening way, including your expectations about delaying alcohol use.
- Be involved in their lives Get to know their friends so that you are aware who they are with and where they are going. Attempt to develop relationships with their friends parents to discuss your expectations and guidelines about alcohol. You may find that others have similar concerns about alcohol however others may not.
- Setting of clear boundaries is crucial as it provides them with a "safety net" and allows adolescents freedom to grow.
- Help them deal with peer pressure by discussing making good decisions and assisting them in how best to deal with the situation where they are offered alcohol.
- There are times when parents need to say "NO" to their children. This creates an opportunity for children to learn to deal with frustration, disappointment and impulse control.

MOST CHILDREN WILL NOT HAVE A PROBLEM WITH ALCOHOL HOWEVER THEY WILL FIND THEMSELVES IN VARIOUS SITUATIONS WHERE THEY NEED PARENTAL SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE ON HOW BEST TO DEAL WITH ALCOHOL RELATED SCENARIOS.

A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE CAN OPENLY DISCUSS DIFFICULT ISSUES AND ASK QUESTIONS CAN REDUCE THE RISK OF POTENTIAL PROBLEMS OCCURRING.