



West Midlands Police supporting documentation

Licensing review

Brooklyn News

Birdbrook Road

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Coronavirus: stay safe with our facts, information and practical advice about alcohol and your health

drinkaware.co.uk

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Teenage drinking

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Our research indicates that the average age a person first tries alcohol is now 13.3 (1). Alcohol can have serious effects on developing brains and bodies, as well as leaving teenagers vulnerable to unsafe situations.

Drinking alcohol is seen as something teenagers are expected to do as part of growing up but starting to drink so young is more damaging than many teenagers realise.

Understanding how to talk to teenagers about alcohol can help you get to talk to them about the risks.

Teenage drinking statistics

The Health and Social Care Information Centre's 2014 report (2) documents the drinking habits of teenagers. Of the teenagers surveyed:

- 8% had drunk alcohol in the last week
- 22% of those who had drunk alcohol in the past week had drunk 15 units or more in that week
- Girls were more likely to report having been drunk than boys (10%, compared with 7%)

However not all teenagers drink, the number of 11-15 year olds who had tried alcohol (38%) was the lowest since the surveys began.

Despite this encouraging trend what's concerning is that there were still 13,725 under-18s admitted to hospital with alcohol related problems between 2011/12 and 2013/14 (3).

Why do teenagers drink?

It's easy for adults to dismiss teen drinking as a straightforward act of youthful rebellion but the reasons teenagers start drinking can be complicated and varied.

Peer pressure can be a major factor in contributing to drinking for the first time as teenagers feel the pressure to keep up with their friends to fit in.

The feeling that every other teenager is drinking can be made worse by popular culture, as TV and films often show teenagers with alcohol. A recent study found that adolescents with the highest exposure to alcohol use in films were more likely to have tried alcohol compared with those least exposed and more likely to binge drink (4).



Teenagers may also drink to temporarily distract themselves from the pressures or worries of life. Puberty is a tough time and teenagers may wrongly think drinking is a way to cope.

Drinking affecting teenager's health

Teenagers can think they're invincible but drinking when too young can damage health and wellbeing of young people. Most noticeable are the short term effects, such as bad breath, bad skin and weight gain.

However, more damaging is the potential effect of drinking on the young brain. Teenage years are important time for brain development.

The 2009 Chief Medical Officer Reported concerns that heavy drinking at under twenty years old was associated with abnormalities in brain areas dealing with motivation, reasoning and interpersonal interactions. Subsequent research has shown that alcohol is indeed causing such changes in some young people (5)

Alcohol can also lower inhibitions which can make it more likely for teenagers to make risky like getting into fights or having unprotected sex.

Find out more about the risks of underage drinking >

How to talk to your teenager about alcohol

The best way to talk to your teenager about alcohol is to sit them down and have an open, honest talk. If possible, try and talk to them before you suspect they've started drinking.

As a defense teenagers can say it's unfair that parents lecture them about drinking but drink alcohol themselves. You can agree that large amounts of alcohol are harmful to anyone, but also you can say that young people seem to be more vulnerable in some ways.

If your child expresses frustration at you drinking while telling them not to, this could be time to start cutting down your drinking (get tips on how to cut down drinking alcohol at home).

Make sure your teenager knows they can come to you with any problems. Let them know alcohol abuse may be a symptom of how they're feeling, and never a solution to a problem. There will be other ways of dealing with it.

We offer advice, tools and videos from Family Lives in our underage drinking support section.

References

- (1) Drinkaware 2014 Monitor: Young People Report. Available at: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/about-us/knowledge-bank/young-people-monitor-key-points>
- (2) NHS website. Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2014. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/smoking-drinking-and-drug-use-among-young-people-in-england/2014>
- (3) Public Health England Local Alcohol Profiles for England. June 2015 update. Available from: <http://lape.org.uk/>
- (4) University of Bristol. Drinking alcohol in films linked to teenagers' alcohol use. Available at: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/news/2015/alcohol-in-films.htm>
- (5) 2009 Chief Medical Officer Report. Guidance on the Consumption of Alcohol by Children and Young People. Available at: <http://www.cph.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Guidance-on-the-consumption-of-alcohol-by-children-and-young-people.pdf>



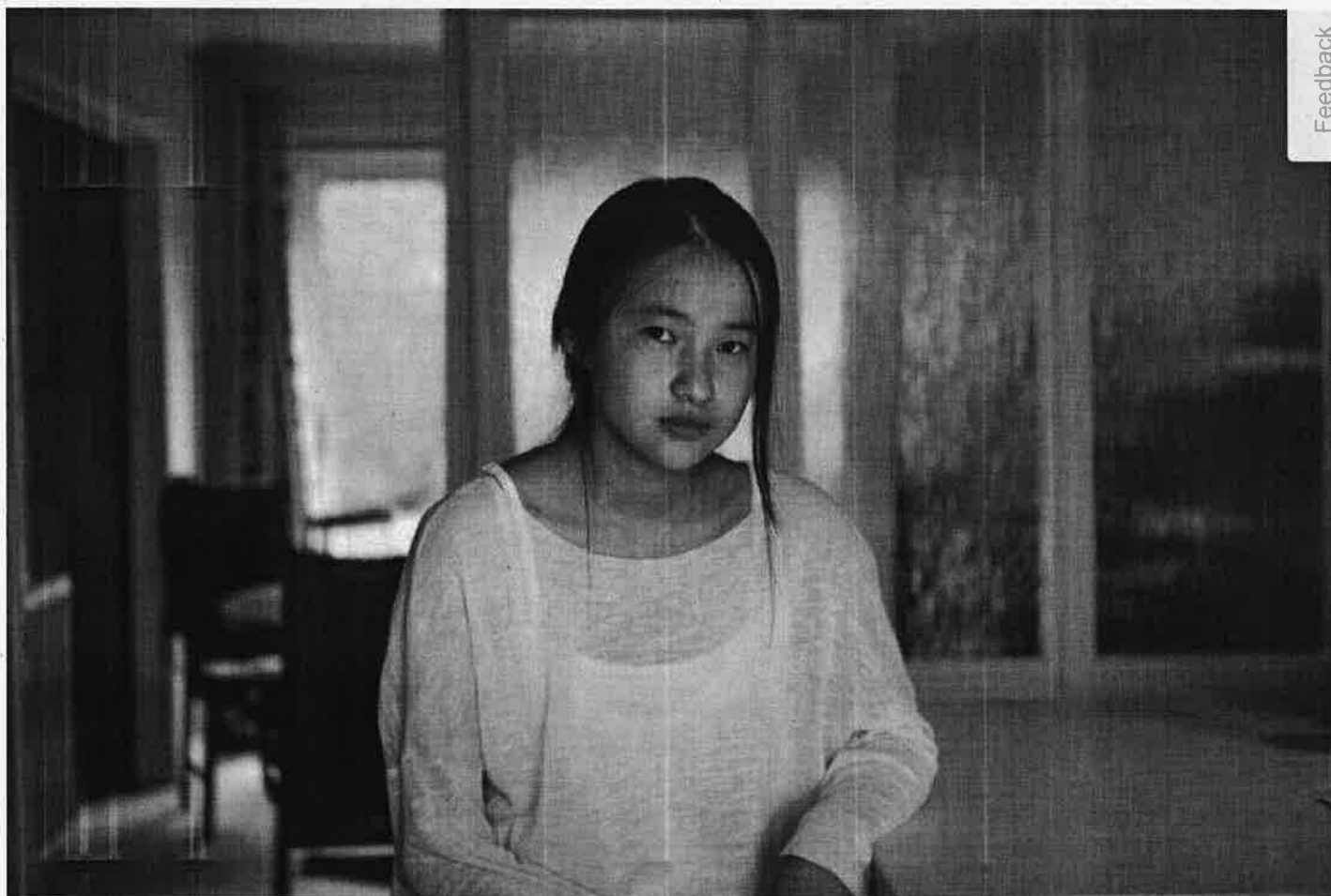
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Alcohol and substance abuse

Helping families overcome problems caused by alcohol and drugs

We believe it's important to help all family members overcome problems caused by alcohol and drugs.

Young people who use alcohol and illegal drugs are at increased risk of:



Feedback

- missing school



- poor health
- committing crime
- being sexually exploited

Where it is the parent with a drug and/or alcohol problem, children are more likely to be neglected, suffer domestic violence and misuse drink and drugs themselves.

We offer counselling and support for children, young people and their parents to help them turn their lives around.

We focus on the children. We listen to them so we can understand their problems. We offer them advice and support such as:

- teaching them basic life skills like reading and writing
- access to computers and IT training
- subsidised meals and laundry services if they are homeless

Find a service

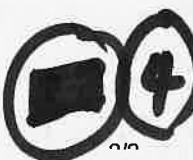
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Should my child drink alcohol?

Children and young people are advised not to drink alcohol before the age of 18.

Alcohol use during the teenage years is related to a wide range of health and social problems.

However, if children do drink alcohol underage, it shouldn't be until they are at least 15.

Health advice

The Chief Medical Officer has provided guidance on the consumption of alcohol by children and young people (PDF, 1.5Mb) (Link: <http://www.cph.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Guidance-on-the-consumption-of-alcohol-by-children-and-young-people.pdf>). This can help parents make decisions about their children and their relationship with alcohol.

Health risks:

- Drinking alcohol can damage a child's health, even if they're 15 or older. It can affect the normal development of vital organs and functions, including the brain, liver, bones and hormones.
- Beginning to drink before age 14 is associated with increased health risks, including alcohol-related injuries, involvement in violence, and suicidal thoughts and attempts.
- Drinking at an early age is also associated with risky behaviour, such as violence, having more sexual partners, pregnancy, using drugs, employment problems and drink driving.

Advice for parents:

- If children do drink alcohol, they shouldn't do so until they're at least 15 years old.
- If 15 to 17 year olds drink alcohol, it should be rarely, and never more than once a week. They should always be supervised by a parent or carer.
- If 15 to 17 year olds drink alcohol, they should never exceed the recommended adult weekly limit (14 units of alcohol). 1 unit of alcohol is about half a pint of normal-strength beer or a single measure (25ml) of spirits. A small glass of wine equals 1.5 units of alcohol. Read more about alcohol units (Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/calculating-alcohol-units/).
- If your child intends to drink alcohol, using positive practices such as incentives, setting limits, agreeing on specific boundaries and offering advice can help.

Talking to your child

Talk to your child about the dangers of alcohol before they start drinking. You can use the points below as guidance.

- Make it clear that you disapprove. Research suggests that children are less likely to drink alcohol when their parents show that they don't agree with it.
- Don't shout at your child, because it will make them defensive and could make the situation worse. Stay calm and firm.



- Make it clear that you're there for them if they need you, and answer any questions they have.
- Talk to your child about how alcohol affects judgement. Drinking too much could lead them to doing something they later regret, such as having unprotected sex, getting into fights or drink driving.
- Warn your child about the dangers of drink spiking (Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/drink-spiking-and-date-rape-drugs/) and how to avoid it.
- If your child wants to drink alcohol, advise them to eat something first, not drink too much and have a soft drink between alcoholic drinks.
- Make sure your child tells you where they're going and has a plan for getting home safely. If they're planning to drink, make sure they're with friends who can look after them.

You may also find the alcohol misuse (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/alcohol-misuse/) topic and the section about drinking and alcohol (Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/) useful.

Drinkaware also has information and advice about talking to your child about alcohol (Link: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking/how-to-talk-about-alcohol/>).

What the law says

The police can stop, fine or arrest a person under 18 who is drinking alcohol in public. If you're under 18, it's against the law:

- for someone to sell you alcohol
- to buy or try to buy alcohol
- for an adult to buy or try to buy alcohol for you
- to drink alcohol in licensed premises, such as a pub or restaurant

However, if you're 16 or 17 and accompanied by an adult, you can drink (but not buy) beer, wine or cider with a meal.

If you're 16 or under, you may be able to go to a pub or premises that's primarily used to sell alcohol if you're accompanied by an adult. However, this isn't always the case and it can depend on the premises and the licensable activities taking place there.

It's illegal to give alcohol to children under 5.

Further information:

- Drinking and alcohol (Link: www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/)

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Next review due: 18 September 2021

