Years 7, 8 and 9 parents: Why the 'alcohol and parties' discussion is important now!

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Outline of presentation

- my observations of parents and parenting around alcohol
- Australian school-based young people and alcohol – is it getting worse?
- what does the data mean for parents of Years 7, 8 and 9 parents?
- why shouldn't young people be drinking?
- what influence can a parent have in preventing early drinking?
- teenage parties and gatherings
- some simple 'take-home' messages for parents
Does any parent really want their teen to drink?

Most probably not ... however ...

- small minority simply don't care – abusive in their response
- there are certainly cultural issues to consider – drinking small amounts in a family context is a 'tradition'
- some desperately want to be their child's friend and are frightened of saying 'no'
- "we all did it ... there's nothing wrong with us!"
- others may want to relive their adolescence by drinking with their teens or 'becoming one of the gang'
- it's just too hard and whatever they do, it won't make a difference

What does the evidence say – can you make a difference?
No parent wants to be 'hated' but giving your child everything they want to avoid conflict is problematic

They need to hear 'no' regularly ... there also needs to be age-appropriate monitoring

Allowing your 12, 13 or 14 year-old son or daughter to go to a sleepover without checking up on them is not appropriate!

Get it right when they're young and you'll have nowhere as near as many problems when they're older

- have a curfew later than 9pm for a Year 7, 8 or 9 - you have signed your own death warrant!

Yes you can ... you've just got to be a parent!

Lay the foundations now and it'll be much easier in later years ...
Alcohol

How about school-based young people? Is it getting worse?
The majority of young people across all age groups have tried alcohol, with use increasing as they get older. That said, it is important to remember that almost one in five Year 10 students have never consumed alcohol.
Australian secondary school students who describe themselves as non-drinkers (%), 2011

2011 ASSAD Survey (White & Bariola, 2011)

Even though many of them have tried alcohol, the vast majority of them still regard themselves as 'non-drinkers' until they reach 16 years of age.
Respondents were classified as 'non-drinkers' (never had a glass of alcohol), 'moderate drinkers' (had a full glass but not more than four drinks on a single occasion in the last month) or 'risky drinkers' (had more than four drinks on one or more occasions in the last month). Although there are more small numbers of 'risky drinkers' in Years 8 and 9, it is Year 10 where things begin to change.
So what does this mean for parents of Year 7s, 8s and 9s?

Year 10 is where alcohol becomes a significant part of their lives - often due to parental behaviour (less monitoring) in Year 9

What you do now can prevent or delay teen drinking – a delay of just 6 months can help reduce the risk of drinking problems in the future

- develop rules around alcohol and parties/gatherings early
- don't allow 'sleepovers' without doing appropriate checking
- take them to where they're supposedly going and pick them up
- and if you think "It's just one drink, it won't hurt them ..." think again ...
Average number of drinks consumed by current drinkers in past seven days, by age and gender, 2011

2011 ASSAD Survey (White & Bariola, 2011)

Unfortunately 'current drinkers' consumed a lot of alcohol. Across all ages, average drinking levels reported exceeded recommended levels for adults.
Why shouldn't young people be drinking?

Growing evidence that we should be delaying alcohol use for as long as possible – key concerns ...

- the **developing brain**
- increased risk of **liver disease**
- increased cancer risk, particularly **breast cancer in young women**
- the earlier you drink, the greater risk of future alcohol problems, including **dependency**
- more likely to be **sexually active** at earlier ages, to have sexual intercourse more often, and to have unprotected sex
- more likely to be **victims of violent crime**, including rape, aggravated assault, and robbery
FACT: Alcohol interferes with the growing brain...well into your 20’s.

www.springfieldprevention.org
Alcohol and the developing brain

Alcohol damages two areas of the brain that undergo major changes in adolescence

- the hippocampus deals with memory and learning - suffers the worst damage. Those who drink more and for longer have significantly smaller hippocampi (up to 10% smaller)
- the prefrontal area undergoes most change during adolescence - teen drinking could cause severe changes, affecting the formation of adult personality and behaviour

If a young person is going to drink alcohol at this time - make sure it is a small amount and that they do not drink regularly. However, the evidence clearly indicates that they should not drink at all.
Alcohol and the developing brain

These brain scans show the possible impact that alcohol can have on the adolescent brain

- The first shows a 15 year-old non-drinker - the pink and orange indicates healthy activity, particularly in the prefrontal area and the hippocampus.

- The bottom one shows a 15 year-old heavy drinker - an unhealthy brain with little or no activity in the key areas.
Can parents make a difference?

A number of things parents can do that can have a major impact ... start them early!

- **promote positive norms** – the majority of 15 year-olds classify themselves as non-drinkers
- **challenge misconceptions** – 'not everyone does it', alcohol is a drug and it is possible to celebrate without it ...
- **tell your child your views on teen drinking** – make your values absolutely clear and your reasons for this stand
- **role-modelling** – both positive and negative effects
- **parenting style** – what type of parent are you?
Role-modelling

What has your teen learnt about alcohol and socializing from watching you?
How can you be a positive role model?
(www.parentingstrategies.net)

Parents - powerful influence, even on teens ...

- **limit your alcohol use**, especially in front of your children
- **do not get drunk**, especially in front of your children
- sometimes **decline the offer of alcohol**
- **provide food and non-alcoholic beverages** if making alcohol available to guests
- **never drink and drive**
- **do not portray alcohol as a good way to deal with stress**, such as by saying, "I've had a bad day, I need a drink!"
- **use healthy ways to cope with stress** without alcohol, e.g., exercise, listening to music, or talking things over
Parenting style

What type of parent are you and what do we know about the influence of particular parenting styles?
Different types of parenting styles have been identified:

- **authoritarian** (strictness but not warmth)
- **authoritative** (warmth and strictness)
- **indulgent** (warmth but not strictness)
- **neglectful** (neither warmth nor strictness)
Authoritative parenting
Woulfe, C. in 'The Listener' (2014)

"The single most important thing parents can do to raise healthy, happy and successful kids is to practice authoritative parenting"
Laurence Steinberg in 'Age of Opportunity'

Steinberg says it's crucial that parents excel in three areas:

- **be warm** – "you can't spoil a child with love" – you want to build your child's sense of feeling loved, valued and protected
- **be firm** – "set rules that are grounded in logic and purpose" and make adjustments as they get older and reward good behaviour
- **be supportive** – "gradually relinquish control and try to permit – rather than protect – when you can". If you decide to say 'no', explain why
Teenage parties and alcohol

Should you let your child go to teenage parties?

- Yes! This is how they learn to socialize – but make sure you find out as much as you can about the event as possible

Should you hold teenage parties?

- Yes! But make sure your child knows that holding a party is a joint responsibility - not just yours!

Should you serve alcohol at a teenage party?

- Absolutely not! In most states this is now illegal and no matter what you think, it is impossible to monitor alcohol at this type of event
Details of a 1 year old birthday party as reported in a recent media story ...

- Pocahontas and teepees
- a balloon artist and a face painter
- a petting zoo with 35 animals
- a cowboy and Indian photo booth
- Wild West themed snacks, plus "gorgeous champagne and incredible food" for adults

"You know how you have bridezillas who want everything because their best friend had it? We now get people calling and asking what their friends had for their kids party, and then asking for the next level up. If their friend had two entertainers, they want three. If their friend spent $2000 they want to spend $3000."

Sunday Herald, 2 November 2014
So what can a parent do around alcohol?

We cannot inoculate our children from these issues but we can ...

- **be a positive role model** – look at how you socialise with alcohol and talk about it
- **promote positive norms** - not everyone drinks and most don’t drink irresponsibly
- **create rules and consequences** around alcohol and parties early, modify them as they get older but don’t be influenced by others – stick to your guns!
- if things get out of hand, **seek professional help nice and early** – certain behaviour is not normal and needs to be addressed
The final word ...

Three simple golden rules:

- know where your child is
- know who they're with, and
- know when they'll be home

Tell your children they're great, all the time!

- there is always something positive you can find to say about your child - find it and say it!

Really listen to your child and 'connect'

- when did you last 'connect' with your child? Try to find the time at least once a week for a few minutes to really talk and listen to your child – it'll be worth it in so many ways!
For further information or you are interested in more of what I have to say …

*Teenagers, Alcohol and Drugs* is available at your local bookstore or on-line

For a PDF copy of this presentation or a list of references and supporting information, please go to my website - [www.darta.net.au](http://www.darta.net.au)

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