Why do teens do the things they do and how do you best handle the alcohol issue?

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Outline of presentation

- history of 'teenagers', rebellion and 'temptations'
- are today's temptations more dangerous?
- why is adolescence such a risky time?
- what is it about their brains that make them do the things they do?
- how many young Australians are drinking alcohol?
- so what should parents be doing to keep their teens safe?
- three parenting tips that prevent or delay early drinking and illicit drug use
History of teenagers

1900 – 'teenagers' did not exist

- "no culture or institution that united them or fostered peer group development on a societal scale" (Schrum, 2008)
- Legislation began to separate adults and children – e.g., minimum age requirements for sexual consent, marriage, school attendance and work
- Later – voting, driving and drinking

Dramatic rise in high school attendance – single most important factor in creating teenage culture

- High school, based on biological age, reshaped experiences of 13-18 year olds
- US between 1910-1930 – enrolment rose almost 400%
- High schools promoted "unsupervised peer interaction"
During the 1920s, 30s and 40s companies began to recognize high schoolers as consumers.

The 'teenage' identity
The term 'teenager'

Advertisers and marketers saw a new market ...

"Celebrating the notion of carefree, high school bobby soxers ... they began to promote a new social type they dubbed 'teeners,' 'teensters,' and, in 1941, 'teenagers.' ... tied to the new high school world of dating, driving, music, and enjoyment. Although it would take a few years for the term 'teenager' to catch on in the popular mind, the concept was spreading rapidly, particularly as a marketing tool" (Palladino, 1996)

Growing media technology (e.g., development of TV and FM radio) linked to teenage culture

Lots of leisure time, more independence from families

"peer groups and market advertising became as influential as families once were ... ideology of 'youth as fun' also began to be read by many adults as 'youth as trouble'" (Abbowitz & Rees)
Teenage rebellion

With an identity established, teens began to imitate adults, at the same time rejecting adult rules.
Teenage rebellion and the 1950s

Teens hit 'mainstream' in the 50s - distinctive dress, habits and culture fuelled by popular media
'Temptations'

Since the 20s 'temptations' have caused parental (adult) concern

- pool halls (1920s)
- music – jazz (40s), rock and roll (50s), punk (70s)
  - make-up and clothing
  - alcohol and other drugs

New temptations now exist

- new range of drugs
- the Internet and social media
  - internet porn and gambling
  - 'sexting' and online bullying

Also now know more about 'older' problems

- body image
- mental health issues
Are they worse than in the past?

Adolescence always been a dangerous time - most get through relatively unscathed ... why worry?

There are differences ...

- adolescents exposed to issues much earlier
- very young teens are now specifically targeted by advertisers
- exposure is relentless
- information communicated immediately - no 'wait-time'
- trends and fads spread fast – worldwide
- often linked to technology that is constantly changing – difficult for adults to track
So why is adolescence such a difficult time? Why are young people more prone to risky behaviour during this time?
It's all due to the adolescent brain ...

Understand what is happening here and it can have a significant impact on your relationship with your teen?
Adolescents have less developed brains than adults

Far less developed than we once thought – males developing much later than females

- **adults** rely on prefrontal, hippocampus, promotor cortex – reasoning, judgment and other functions more likely to be used
- **adolescents** use the amygdala (emotions) to process information
  - respond with 'gut reactions', rather than think through possible consequences
  - a decrease in reasoned thinking and an increase in impulsiveness
  - adolescence – a period of 'increased risk taking'
What does 'increased risk taking' actually mean?

They weigh risk reward differently – they know the dangers but value the reward more than adults

- reward increases if around their peers
- "don't downgrade the risk, they give more weight to the payoff"
- contradicts basic human behavior – why does it happen?

Teens "engage in high-risk behavior to leave the village and find a mate" – an evolutionary feature

- not only humans – rodents, primates and some birds seek out same-age peers and fight with parents – "all help get the adolescent away from home territory"
- difficult to fight this biology of risk taking – it's part of growing up and is necessary
So what do we need to remember about young people?

We must remember their brains have not fully developed. They're 'missing a part of their brain' ... therefore they ...

- feel they will live forever and take risks without consequences
- don't believe what happens to others will happen to them
- have limited attention spans and a different concept of time
- lack experience in communal responsibility

- young men potentially even more difficult – respond emotionally, understate risks and overstate gains and can be impervious to punishment
Alcohol use by Australian school-based young people

What do we know and at what age does drinking start?
Never consumed alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), by age and gender, 2014

White & Williams (2016) *Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014*

![Bar chart showing percentage of never alcohol consumption by age and gender for Australian secondary school students in 2014.](chart_image)
Never consumed alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), 2011-2014

White & Williams (2016) *Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014*
Never consumed alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), 1999-2014

White & Williams (2016) *Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014*
Students who describe themselves as a 'non-drinker', Australian secondary school students (%), by age and gender, 2014

White & Williams (2016) "Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014"
Students who describe themselves as a 'non-drinker',
Australian secondary school students (%), 2011-2014

White & Williams (2016) *Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014*
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.
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Average number of drinks consumed by current drinkers in past seven days, by age and gender, Australia, 2014

White & Williams (2016) *Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014*
What can parents do to keep their teens safe? What are parents doing around alcohol and what does the research say they should be doing?
Common sources of last alcoholic drink among current drinkers if they did not buy themselves, (%), by age and gender, 2014

White & Williams (2016) *Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014*
Current drinkers drinking at home, at a party or at a friends' house who consumed their last alcoholic drink under adult supervision (%), 2014

White & Williams (2016) *Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014*

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DARTA Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
What about alcohol and other drugs?

Some worry so much about illicit drugs - forget about alcohol.

No guarantees but get alcohol right and there's a good chance other things will follow ...

Some barriers that prevent parents dealing with alcohol ...

- they drink - **hypocrites if they 'get tough'** in that area
- they drank when they were young – "**there's nothing wrong with me!**"
- 'everybody does it' – it's just too hard to set rules here when it seems you're the only one that does
- we live in an alcohol-soaked culture – "**what hope do we have of making a difference?**"

So can you make a difference in the alcohol area?
It's no wonder parents are confused – lots of theories on what works

Also lots of critics telling you what you shouldn't be doing ... some really practical ideas too ...
Can parents really make a difference?

Research shows parents have a great influence - from an early age they should

- **acknowledge all types of drinking** – 'risky', 'moderate' and 'non-drinking' – it is an option!
- **if you know a non-drinker** – talk about them
- **discuss reasons people choose not to drink**
- **promote positive norms** – most 15 year-olds classify themselves as non-drinkers, most don't use illicit drugs
- **ensure you and your partner have a 'united front'**
- **challenge misconceptions and avoid generalizations** – alcohol is a drug, 'not everyone does it' and it is possible to celebrate without it, drugs aren't 'everywhere'

- **be a positive role-model**
- **look at their 'parenting style'**
Role-modelling

What has your teen learnt about alcohol and socializing from watching you?
What can you do to be a positive role model?

Parents - powerful influence, even on teens ...

- don't be frightened to talk about your alcohol use – how do you try to drink safely?
- limit your alcohol use, especially in front of your children
- provide food and non-alcoholic beverages if making alcohol available to guests
- organise events with families and friends that don't involve alcohol
- don't portray alcohol as a good way to deal with stress, e.g., "I've had a bad day, I need a drink!"
- sometimes decline the offer of alcohol

Tips for modelling low-risk drinking

**DO**
- Model responsible drinking around your children from when they are very young.
- Make a point of sometimes refusing alcohol when your children are present.
- Make sure you provide food and non-alcoholic beverages if making alcohol available to guests.
- Model healthy ways of coping with stress without alcohol like exercise, listening to music, or talking things over.

**DON'T**
- Drink and drive.
- Let other adults drive after attending a function at your place.
- Portray alcohol as a good way to deal with stress, e.g., "I've had a bad day, I need a drink!"
- Convey the idea alcohol is fun or glamorous through stories about your own or others' drinking.
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)
"The single most important thing parents can do to raise healthy, happy and successful kids is to practice authoritative parenting"

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
Keep connected ...

Can be difficult, particularly if you're saying 'no' all the time - going to be 'butting heads'

- always look for opportunities to say 'yes'

You are now moving from a 'managing' role (parent-child) to a 'consulting' one (parent-adolescent)

Need practical strategies to get (and keep) you talking

- use the car
- talk late at night, very late!
- taking them to a restaurant for dinner
- use of indirect communication – notes, emails, texts
- how to use the dinner table and how not to!
Save the app that could save your life

Emergency +

Use opportunity to put app on your family's smartphones to start a conversation about expectations and keeping safe.
The final word ...

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!

Three simple golden rules ...
- know where your child is
- know who they're with
- know when they'll be home
For further information or you are interested in more of what I have to say ...

For a PDF copy of this presentation or a list of references and supporting information, please go to my website - www.darta.net.au

Please feel free to contact me by email - p.dillon@darta.net.au or follow me on Facebook or Twitter (Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia) or go to my blogs – 'Doing Drugs with Paul Dillon' or 'The Real Deal on Drugs'

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DOING DRUGS WITH PAUL DILLON

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2012

The 'Schoolies' Week' phenomenon

It's that time of year that many parents dread - the build up to 'Schoolies' Week' or 'Leavers' Week' at it is known in the UK. Last week Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr issued a warning to Schoolies travelling overseas that if they break the law consular staff can't 'rescue them if they are arrested'. It was a great move by the Australian Government in my opinion but I doubt very much if it will have any great effect on those young people who choose to go overseas for Schoolies celebrations.

You only need to take a look at a story that ran on Channel Ten's 'The Project' in response to the DRAs warning to needless what we are up against. If you go to the following link the story on Schoolies travelling overseas begins at 29:26am. The interview with the two young women who are planning to travel to Bali is quite disturbing. When asked why they chose to go overseas they made it clear that it is to avoid the laws around alcohol as they will be under age and that the purpose of the trip is to get drunk. I know that it is extremely difficult to stop young people from attending Schoolies' Week events but any parent who believes that it is safer for their child to travel overseas to party rather than make the pilgrimage to the Gold Coast, Byron, Bicheno or Victoria Harbour they have their heads in the sand.

Of course you have to let your child experience life and they are going to make mistakes. Some parents have said to me that their child is planning to take a 'gap year' and that they see the overseas Schoolies' Week as a controlled introduction to that experience. Are they nuts? The attraction for many young people to travel overseas for 'Schoolies' is that they are not subject to laws!