Teens, parties and alcohol: A practical guide to keeping your child safe

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Outline of presentation

- Australian illicit drug use – 2013 NDHS, 2014 ASSAD
  - new secondary school student data released end of 2016
- what do we know about young people and drinking? Are things changing?
- why shouldn't young people be drinking?
- what happens at parties and gatherings and how can you keep your teen safe?
  - what you must do when they get invited?
  - what you must do on the night if they attend?
- five tips for parents around parties and gatherings to keep your teen safe
- three parenting tips that prevent or delay early drinking and illicit drug use
How many Australians have ever used illicit drugs?
Drug use is not the norm across the general community. Cannabis continues to be the most popular illicit drug in Australia and just over 10 per cent of the population have ever tried ecstasy. Contrary to media reports, methamphetamine use is not increasing in use. It is a great problem, however, amongst certain populations and in particular areas.
Most Australians have never used illicit drugs. Even cannabis, the most popular illicit drug, has not been tried by the majority of the population (65% of the sample reporting never using the drug)
What about young people? How many school-based young people have ever used drugs and are things changing?
The vast majority of Australian secondary school students have never used illicit drugs. Drug use increases as they get older but we can still say that being at school is a 'protective factor' when it comes to drug use. Analgesics continue to be the most widely used drugs amongst this population.
Prevalence (%) of never used drugs (excluding tobacco, and alcohol) among 12-17 year old students

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

Where possible, **we should be promoting 'positive norms'** – showing young people the data that shows clearly that if they don’t use illicit drugs, they are in the majority. **Most school-based young people do not use illicit drugs**
Overall, the story is a positive one. **Once again, most secondary school students have not used drugs in the past year.** However, cannabis use has slightly increased, as has the use of ecstasy and cocaine, although these were not significant increases.
Alcohol

What do we know about school-based young people and alcohol? Are things changing in that area?
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*

Younger females are less likely to have ever consumed alcohol than their male counterparts. But by 14-years-old, the likelihood of consuming alcohol evens out across genders and then as they get older, young women are less likely to have never drank. One possible reason for this could be that many young women are associating with older boys and are exposed to drinking behaviour.
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

When comparing the 2011 data with the latest figures, the number of young people who had never consumed alcohol had increased across all age groups. The most significant increase was amongst the 15-year-olds, with over one quarter of this age group now reporting they had never consumed alcohol.
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

The number of Australian secondary school students aged 12-17 years has increased significantly, from around one in ten in 1999, to almost one in three in 2014. Non-drinking appears to be increasingly seen as a viable option for young people.
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 were asked to classify their drinking – 'non-drinkers', 'occasional drinkers', 'party drinkers' or 'heavy drinkers'. As they got older, females became slightly less likely to describe themselves as 'non-drinkers' compared to males of the same age. Half of 16-year-olds said they were 'non-drinkers'.
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

When comparing the 2011 data with the latest figures, the number of 'non-drinkers' has increased across all age groups. Once again, the most significant increase was amongst the 15-year-olds, with almost 70% of that age group describing themselves as 'non-drinkers'.
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 occasions 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.
The survey no longer provides data for each age group, instead grouping students into either 12-15 years or 16-17 years. Of those young people who had drank alcohol in the previous week (i.e., ‘current drinkers’), the average number of drinks consumed was high across both age groups and across gender. Males consumed more alcohol than their female counterparts, with 16-17-year-old males drinking almost 9 standard drinks when they drank...
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, have sexual intercourse more often, and have unprotected sex
- more likely to be **victims of violent crime**, including rape, aggravated assault, and robbery
Teenage parties and gatherings

What really goes on and how can you best keep your teen safe if they attend these events?
Changes in most common sources of last alcoholic drink among current drinkers, 2002-2014

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

Across time, there has not been any significant change in where 'current drinkers' source their alcohol. Parents continue to be the most common source, with friends being the next most likely to provide them alcohol. Unfortunately, the 2014 data shows an increase in the number of students reporting that parents were the most common source of alcohol. This goes against the downward trend we have seen in this area since 2002.
Most common locations for consuming alcohol for current drinkers (%), 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

Amongst 12-15-year-olds, regardless of gender, young people report the home as the most common location for them to consume alcohol. This suggests that this drinking is more likely to be under adult supervision, possibly with the family meal. Parties become the most likely location for drinking amongst the older group.
Across age and gender, most young people report that if they are drinking under adult supervision, this drinking is likely to take place in the home. This could suggest that this drinking is taking place with the family meal or the like. **Of concern is the large number of ‘current drinkers’, particularly the younger group, who report that they drank alcohol under adult supervision at a party.**
What do you do when they're invited and want to attend?

Don't be bullied into a decision – you don't have to give an answer straight away, no matter what they say

- if both parents are on the scene make it clear that both of you make the decision
- show a 'united front' – "Don't come to me, don't go to them, come to us"

Make an informed decision – impossible to do without good quality information. Four questions need to be answered:

- whose party is it and do you know them and/or their parents?
- where will the party be held?
- will the parents be there and will they be actively supervising the party?
- what time does it start and what time does it finish?
So where do you get that information from?

You need a range of information - a number of places you can go ...

- **ask your child** – not most reliable source and likely to avoid telling you anything they know would prevent them from going but always ask them first
- **go to the source** – **contact the parents hosting the party**. This is the best place to go but you're going to get resistance from your teen and the conversation with the parents is not always easy
- **talk to other parents** – use or create networks and find out from other parents what they know about the event
- **look at social media** – what has been posted online about the event?
So what do you ask when you make the call?

Before making the call, carefully plan and write down your questions. They should include the basics …

- will you be there and will you be actively supervising?
- what time does it start and what time does it finish?

You may have questions around alcohol – much more difficult. These could include:

- is alcohol going to be 'permitted' or 'tolerated'? 
- how will you be handling the alcohol issue?
- will an effort be made to stop alcohol being taken into the party?
- will there be security present?
How are they going to get there and how are they getting home?

Most importantly, you make the decision about how they get to and home from the party

- this should be a 'non-negotiable'
- safest option – you take them and pick them up – but not always possible
- if you're not – speak to the parent who will be and confirm details – don't rely on what your child says
- if you are ...
  - dropping off lets you know where they're going, meet the host parents and assess the event
  - picking up helps you know what they've been doing and what went down
  - avoid picking up by text and taxis and Uber can be abused
  - you can go to bed knowing that they are safe
So if you say 'yes', what do you do on the night?

Regardless of age, never let your child leave the house without reminding them of the following:

- "You can call me anytime, anywhere – if something goes wrong and you need me – I'll be there"
- if you say it – you and/or your partner must actually be available
- if you want to be able to get into your car to help your child, one of you won't be able to drink alcohol
- taxis and Ubers are an option but not always reliable

Other things to talk about before they leave include:

- discuss 000 reminding them you support them if they need to call
- ensure they have the 'Emergency+' app on their phone
- ensure they have the address of the party in their phone
- have they a 'buddy' for the night? Do you have their number?
- do they have enough cash for a taxi home, just in case?
5 tips for parents around parties and gatherings to keep your teen safe

Not easy, but when it comes to safety these are vital

- **know where your child is and who they're with** – take them to where they're going and pick them up. Don't leave it to someone else!
- **always call the host parents** – speak to them and find out about supervision and whether alcohol will be provided or tolerated – you can then make an informed decision
- **create rules around parties early** – preferably before they start to get invited
- **make consequences of breaking rules clear and stick to them** – ensure they know rules are made because you love them and want them to be safe
- **if they don't like the rules, they're most probably perfect!** Reward good behaviour and modify rules as they get older – need to be age appropriate
Keep connected ...

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

- parties are important in social development – need to look for those you can say 'yes to'

Moving from 'managing' role (parent-child) to '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

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](http://www.darta.net.au)

Please feel free to contact me by email - [p.dillon@darta.net.au](mailto:p.dillon@darta.net.au) or follow me on Facebook or Twitter ([Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia](http://www.darta.net.au)) 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 2013**

**The 'Schoolies' Week' phenomenon**

It’s that time of year that many parents dread - the lead up to 'Schoolies Week' or 'Lawyers' Week as it is known in WA. 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 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 DIA’s warning to realise what we are up against. If you go to the following link the story on Schoolies travelling overseas begins at 2:00am. The interview with the three young women who are planning to travel to Bali is surreal reading. When asked why they chose to go overseas they make 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, Retreat or Port Douglas 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...

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**TEENAGERS, ALCOHOL and DRUGS**

What your kids really want and need to know about alcohol and drugs

**PAUL DILLON**