Top 5 questions parents ask about alcohol: What does the research tell us?
Outline of presentation

- Australia's relationship with alcohol
- what about our young people? Are they drinking more than in the past?
- why shouldn't young people drink alcohol?
- what do parents want to know about alcohol and parenting?
- what does the research tell us?
- so what can parents do to keep their teens safe? Some strategies to help promote healthy values and attitudes around the use of alcohol
- three parenting tips that prevent or delay early drinking
Alcohol

What relationship do we have with alcohol in Australia? How much do we drink and are things changing?
Australia's relationship with alcohol

Do we really have a chance? Whether it's the link with sport ...
Australia's relationship with alcohol

Our attitudes around celebrating and sport ... we see these type of images from every Melbourne Cup ...
Australia's relationship with alcohol

We don't just want to see our politicians having a drink – we want to see them skolling one, as quickly as possible!
Alcohol and Australian school-based young people

What do we know and at what age does drinking start and are trends changing?
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 12-17 years (%), 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 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.
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.
Top 5 questions parents have around teens and alcohol

Questions most usually asked by parents of adolescents are as follows:

- "Should I allow my child to drink at home? What about a glass of wine with a meal?"
- "Does my drinking affect how my child drinks? Should we stop drinking or not drink around them?"
- "What about special occasions? Having a glass of champagne at a wedding or on New Year’s Eve – is that a problem?"
- "How does alcohol affect a teen's brain? I drank alcohol when I was young and there's nothing wrong with me?"
- "What should we be doing and what shouldn't we be doing when it comes to alcohol? How can we make sure our child stays as safe as possible?"
"Should I allow my child to drink at home? What about a glass of wine with a meal?"

Levitt & Cooper (2015) Should parents allow their adolescent children to drink at home? Family factors as predictors of alcohol involvement trajectories over 15 years, *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* 76, 661-670

Some believe that allowing drinking at home is 'developmentally protective'

- supervised, controlled environment – they can learn to drink responsibly and the "allure of the 'forbidden fruit' is minimized"

*Mediterranean model* - introducing alcohol gradually allowing them to drink small amounts with their parents

- growing evidence that it no longer works in the Mediterranean
- not successful in other cultures (e.g., Australia) - other social influences at play
- if this model is used - rules and boundaries must be established at the same time
- what about France and Greece? They don't have problems with teen drinking ...
'Mediterranean Model' – France and Greece

EMCDDA/ESPAD (2016) ESPAD Report 2015 — Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. Lisbon

2009 - **France** raised legal drinking age to 18 to "reduce a dangerous addiction among youths" - both drinking and purchasing ages are now 18

Between 2004-2008 France saw:

- number of children under 15 admitted to hospital for drunkenness increase by 50%
- alcohol-related hospital admissions for those under 24 rose by 50%

2015 ESPAD – **Greece** - teens drink first bottle of beer or wine at 12-13, before moving to spirits (vodka, tequila, whisky) from 14-15

- around 9% Greek teenage boys and 5% of teenage girls get drunk for the first time at 13
"If I give it to them, at least I'll know what they're drinking": What does the research say?


Data released in Jan 2018 ... now looking at a 6-year period of adolescence

"Providing alcohol to children is associated with alcohol-related harms. There is no evidence to support the view that parental supply protects from adverse drinking outcomes by providing alcohol to their child. Parents should be advised that this practice is associated with risk, both directly and indirectly through increased access to alcohol from other sources."

"We found that parental provision of alcohol to their children is associated with subsequent binge drinking, alcohol-related harm(s) and symptoms of alcohol use disorder"

"There was no evidence of any benefit or protective effect, either directly ... or indirectly"

"Parental supply is associated with increased risk of other supply, not the reverse"
"Does my drinking affect how my child drinks? Should we stop drinking or not drink around them?"


When it comes to light to moderate drinking by parents ...

"There is no support for an association between parental alcohol use during childhood and conduct and emotional problems during childhood or adolescence"

(Mahedy et al, 2017)

As far as impact of your drinking on your child's future drinking - not so positive ...

"Almost all prospective studies on this topic have found that parental drinking predicts drinking behaviour in their children; that is, when one or both parents drink more, their offspring are more likely to report more drinking or more alcohol-related problems later on than others ..."

(Rosow et al, 2016)
Parental alcohol role modelling and binge drinking: Are there other influences?


Study examined **parental alcohol role modelling and impact on binge drinking**

"... most important factors in the alcohol socialization process are parental alcohol behaviour. Alcohol habits with a high frequency but low intake per occasion seem to be transmitted to offspring in the same manner as binge drinking, and these drinking practices followed our respondents into adulthood"

Other findings that may surprise some parents included:

- poor school performance did not predict subsequent binge drinking
- high level of parental education associated with child's binge drinking in young adulthood
- other studies have found a high educational level and family affluence are associated with increased rates of teenage drunkenness
Role-modelling

What has your child learnt about alcohol and socializing from watching you – the 'good' and the 'bad'?
So how can you be a positive role model?

Never underestimate your influence, even during the teen years – some strategies include …

- **limit your alcohol use** - it's not about stopping drinking – children learn from observing responsible drinking
- **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
- **organise events with family or friends** where alcohol is not available
- **never drink and drive**
- **do not portray alcohol as a good way to deal with stress**, e.g., "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
"What about special occasions? Having a glass of champagne at a wedding or on New Year's Eve – is that a problem?"

'Special occasions' (weddings, 21st birthdays and NYE) often first place children given 'small amount' of alcohol – seen as 'safe space' promoting 'responsible drinking' when celebrating with family and/or friends

- possibly one the most inappropriate places to introduce alcohol!
- not occasions where responsible drinking is likely to take place
- young people learn by watching others – bad modelling likely to occur
- parents likely to do this are usually drinking - little, if any, monitoring takes place
- message provided - most probably not one you want to send your child - to socialize effectively you need to drink alcohol
- based on what we do know – this is not good practice!
"How does alcohol affect a teen's brain? I drank alcohol when I was young and there's nothing wrong with me?

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

- increased risk of liver disease
- increased cancer risk, particularly breast cancer in young women
- 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
- and, of course ... the developing brain. We know far more now than we did even 20 years ago and the evidence is pretty clear ...
Brain development

Two main stages – 'growth spurts' and 'pruning'

Growth spurts results in increased number of neurons and synapses and enormous potential. Teen brain can't maintain this growth and has to 'prune'

- **learning** - process of creating and strengthening frequently used synapses and discarding unused synapses, keeping only the most efficient

'Use it or lose it' stage – synapses retained or discarded

- what teens do during this period is crucial to brain development - determining structure of the brain
- **vital** they are provided opportunities for critical thinking, decision making, etc
Adolescents have less developed brains than adults

Teen brain 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'
Alcohol and the developing brain

We now know more - two major issues to consider ...

- **alcohol has different effects on an adolescent brain compared to an adult brain**
  - how do these effects impact on young people in the short-term?

- **alcohol adversely affects the developing brain of an adolescent**
  - the brain isn't fully developed during the teen years
  - exposure to alcohol during this time could result in permanent brain changes

As a result - message given to parents around provision of alcohol has changed

- **delay, delay, delay** - try to delay their first drink for as long as possible
Different effects of alcohol on the developing brain

Young people **less susceptible to sedation effect**

- alcohol is a stimulant for young men and women – not a depressant!
- a couple of drinks for adults can cause a depressant effect, i.e., fall to sleep – can take a lot of alcohol for same impact on adolescent
- depressant effects 'kicks-in' – overdose or poisoning
- over-stimulation leads to aggression and violence, particularly when used with other drugs

Young people **more likely to experience loss of memory (‘blackouts’)** – short-term memories are not made into long-term memories

- important in relation to sexual assault
What does alcohol do to the brain?

Like other drugs, alcohol causes effects by altering actions of neurotransmitters

- modifies actions of two major neurotransmitters – GABA and glutamate – increasing dopamine in brain's 'reward centres'
- found throughout the brain – hence alcohol's widespread effects on behavior – i.e., intoxication
- greater effect on developing areas of the brain, compared to those fully developed
- adults 'recover' from intoxication without lasting effects
- evidence now suggests that exposure to alcohol at intoxicating levels may cause permanent brain changes
Alcohol and the developing brain

'Plasticity' - brain's ability to physically change its internal structure when we learn new things

- key neural connections made to wire us to become fully functioning adults – i.e., *use it or lose it* stage
- myelin ('white matter') builds up around axons - 'myelination' - helps information transfer faster and more effective
- white matter will eventually occupy 40% of brain – processing information and relaying instructions, as well as controlling the senses
- drinking alcohol at these times seriously damages 'brain wiring' and prevents myelination
- deficits or developmental delays in this process may lead to cognitive deficits and/or a greater risk of problematic alcohol use in the future
Alcohol and the developing brain

Brain scans show impact alcohol can have on an adolescent brain

- the first - a 15 year-old non drinker - the pink and orange indicates brain activity, particularly in the prefrontal area and hippocampus
- the other - a 15 year-old heavy drinker - an unhealthy brain with little or no activity in the key areas

Are we talking about brain damage here? Many parents reject this science – they drank alcohol in their teens and there's nothing wrong with them ...

For most teens it's 'loss of potential' – they won't be the best they can be ...
"What should we be doing and what shouldn't we be doing when it comes to alcohol? How can we make sure our child stays as safe as possible?"

No easy answers and no 'one-size fits all' – every family is different and no 'expert' can tell you what you should or shouldn't be doing in this area!

- only you can make decisions in this area
- access accurate and up-to-date information, examine your family situation (i.e., role alcohol plays in your life), make a decision nice and early and stick to it ...
- don't be influenced by your best friend, your brother-in-law or your neighbour - 'follow your heart' – if it doesn't feel right, don't do it!

Research has identified risk factors for parents to avoid and protective factors to consider ...
Modifiable parenting factors associated with adolescent alcohol misuse

Based on 131 studies, three **risk** factors ...

- provision of alcohol
- favourable attitudes towards alcohol use
- parental alcohol use

Four **protective** factors ...

- parental monitoring
- parent-child relationship quality
- parental support
- parental involvement

... identified as longitudinal predictors of both alcohol initiation and levels of later alcohol use/misuse

All of the protective factors relate to **parenting style**
Four parenting styles have been identified:

- **Authoritarian** (strictness but not warmth)
- **Authoritative** (warmth and strictness)
- **Permissive** or **Indulgent** (warmth but not strictness)
- **Neglectful** or **Uninvolved** (neither warmth nor strictness)

**Authoritative parenting** identified as most protective ... rules, consequences bound in unconditional love!

**But that is not going to always work, all the time, for all children ...**
"What should we be doing and what shouldn't we be doing when it comes to alcohol? How can we make sure our child stays as safe as possible?"

Evidence is clear – **monitor your child!** Know where they are, know who they're with and know when they'll be home

**Keep 'connected'** – maintain a positive relationship (talk and listen) but maintain fair and age-appropriate rules and boundaries around alcohol and parties

- strict parental rules prevent youth from drinking more alcohol – "**however ... every adolescent responds differently to parenting efforts and the effects of parenting may depend on the genetic make-up of the adolescent**"

**Examine your own relationship with alcohol** and establish what your child has learnt from you – good modelling is vital!

- it's not only your actions but also what you say that's important
- if you drink, make sure you talk about how you drink but also acknowledge that 'non-drinking' is an option

Try to **delay their first drink of alcohol** for as long as possible

- not only around brain development but also future risky drinking – the earlier they start drinking, the greater risk of problems as they get older
Teenage parties, gatherings and even sleepovers become a part of most teen's lives by Year 10. How can you best keep your child safe at these events?
Providing alcohol to your teen for teenage parties

For many parents this becomes an issue from Year 9 on:

- **nobody can tell you what to do with your child regarding alcohol!** You make the decision – not an 'expert', your brother-in-law or your child's best friend's mother! You!

- make that decision based on **good quality information**

- **never provide alcohol to other parents' children** - if you believe it is appropriate for your child to drink, don't assume others feel the same way. It's not only morally wrong – it's illegal!

- **you are not the only one who does not provide alcohol to your child** - no matter what your child tells you

- find other like-minded parents and **create a network**

- **will simply not providing alcohol stop them from drinking?** Most probably not - but if they know where you stand, and why, know the consequences of breaking your rules – if they do drink, they're likely to drink less so they don't get caught!
5 tips to help instill healthy values and attitudes around alcohol in your child

We can't inoculate children to keep them 'alcohol free' - but to instill healthy values and attitudes ...

- **be a positive role model** – look at how you socialize with alcohol and talk about it
- **promote positive norms** - not everyone drinks and most drink responsibly
- **make your views and expectations around alcohol clear** – tell them how you feel and why you feel that way
- **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 early** – certain behaviour is not 'normal' and needs to be addressed

DARTA
Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia

*Make sure your house rules go with them.*

**SOCIAL NORMING**

- CORRECTS misperceptions about the tribe
- CONNECTS with the positive behavior of the tribe
- EMPOWERS all the tribe to make positive choices
Emergency +

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

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

Email - p.dillon@darta.net.au

Facebook - Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia
Twitter - @DARTAPDILLON
Instagram - dillonpauldarta