

REVISED
2007 EDITION

alcohol



what every parent should know

Many parents think their children don't listen to them, don't care what they think and won't do what they say — and vice versa! But what you do and say does have an effect. Talking and listening to your children can be an eye-opener.

'I know what Mum got up to when she was my age because she told me. Now I'm going out with my friends she doesn't seem to trust me. I wish she could see I do have some sense.'

15-year-old girl.

Drinking alcohol is an accepted part of our culture and most young people who drink alcohol do so without experiencing serious problems. They see it as part of growing up, and in time they are likely to develop sensible drinking habits. However, binge drinking and drunkenness have become much more common over the last decade, particularly amongst young people.

And so it's important to help them to understand the risks and keep safe when they drink.

This guide is mainly for parents with teenage children, but you may find it useful when talking with younger children. By the time they are seven, many children have tasted alcohol at home, and they are probably more aware of it than you think.

alcohol

Alcohol: What every parent should know gives facts and figures to help you know what you're talking about. A companion guide, *Drugs: What every parent should know*, gives facts about drugs and how they are used. The information in both guides can help you decide what you want to discuss with your teenagers and how and when to do it. The quotations come from parents and young people—people just like you.

Talking and listening

- Talking builds up trust, and trust helps you to talk. Try to let your children know you aren't judging them—you are concerned.
- Try to find out how much your children really know about alcohol.
- Young people often think they know more than they do. So do parents! If you don't know, say so! Suggest that they try to find out and then tell you, or find out together.
- When there are news stories involving alcohol, ask them what they think and listen to what they say. There are often features about celebrities with drink problems: do they think this is glamorous?
- While respecting their privacy, try to be aware of the magazines or books your child reads, and what sort of messages about alcohol and drugs are coming across. Show some interest—ask them what they think.



How do young people learn about drinking?

Young people learn a lot from:

- friends
- school
- clubs
- you and what they see and hear at home
- the media.

They'll be influenced by your attitudes to alcohol and how much you drink. If they see sensible drinking at home and they know the effects, there's more chance that this will make a big difference to how they manage their social life.

The media, for example magazines, TV programmes and films, often deals in fantasies. Advertising especially can be based on fantasies and as a result unrealistic messages about lifestyle are all around us, on buses, in the street and shops. Because alcohol is a big part of our media and advertising culture this can lead to unrealistic images and expectations about alcohol and drinking. The fantasy may say that drinking is glamorous and that everyone does it while the reality for young people can often be throwing up, feeling sick and scared or losing control.

'I think if parents find out you are drinking and they shout and go off their head at you, it would make you do it more.'

14-year-old girl.

'I think talking to your children really depends on their age. I have two boys and I find it hard to talk to the oldest one because he gets really embarrassed. The younger one comes and tells me everything, he's no bother.'

Mother of boys aged 14 and 16.

A big concern for many young people is how they interact and relate to their peer group. This is of ten particularly apparent when it comes to issues of drinking and alcohol. Young people may feel anxiety about responding to conflicting social messages about drinking. They may also feel pressure to fit in with a crowd or a specific group of friends.

Facts about alcohol

Alcohol is part of everyday life for many people; whether it is a drink with a meal, while watching TV or as part of celebrations such as birthdays and weddings. You may feel confident about what happens with alcohol in your home but not about what goes on outside it.

The information here puts you in the picture about teenage drinking habits. Talking to your teenagers about their social life often seems pointless, but let them know that you're willing to listen at any time. It's important to try not to be judgemental—that can lead to rows and a stand-off.

In 2004, a national survey of school children was conducted in Scotland. This anonymous survey asked young people about drinking, smoking and their experience of drug use. This survey is called the Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS) National Report 2004.



The survey found:

Drinking patterns

- A fifth of 13-year-olds and just over two-fifths of 15-year-olds reported that they drank alcohol in the week before the survey. There was no difference between 13-year-old girls and boys, but 15-year-old girls drank more than 15-year-old boys.
- Amongst this group, the average number of units (see page 11 for units) consumed was 9 (4 pints of beer) for 13-year-olds and 12 (over 6 pints of beer) for 15-year-olds.
- On average boys drank slightly more than girls.
- Just over half of 13-year-olds and around three quarters of 15-year-olds who drank alcohol had been drunk at least once. While 1 in 7 of 13-year-olds and a third of 15-year-olds had been drunk more than 4 times.
- About one third of 13-year-olds and over half of 15-year-olds reported drinking 5 or more drinks on the same occasion, at least once in the last month.

did you know...?



There is a link between drinking, smoking and taking drugs. The 2004 survey showed that 34% of 13-year-olds and 45% of 15-year-olds who were weekly drinkers had taken drugs in the previous month. Only 1% of non-drinkers reported having used drugs. Among regular smokers 59% of 13-year-olds and 64% of 15-year-olds had taken drugs in the previous month. Only 3% of 15-year-olds who were not weekly drinkers and/or regular smokers reported taking drugs in the previous month.

Families and home

- **About one third of 13-year-olds and one fifth of 15-year-olds, who drank alcohol in the week before the survey, said their families didn't know. (This may not be true, of course, even if they believed it.)**
- **However, in this group, over a third of the 13-year-olds and a half of the 15-year-olds said their families didn't mind if they drank alcohol.**
- **Young people were asked if they would be allowed to drink at home. More than eight out of ten 13- and 15-year-olds, who drank alcohol in the week before the survey, said they would be allowed compared with only 4 in 10 of those who did not drink alcohol.**

Binge drinking

Young people are most likely to be at risk when they are out with their friends. Teenagers want to be part of the crowd, and drinking has become a regular social event. Many go out each week deliberately to get drunk, this has become known as binge drinking. Binge drinking can be defined as drinking excessive amounts of alcohol at any one time.

Some young people say they do this because it's fun or because their friends do it. Others say it's because 'there's nothing else to do'. It's important that they know some facts about alcohol. It's not what you drink, it's how much you drink (see page 8).

Health effects of alcohol

Many young people who do drink regularly think it isn't really doing them any harm and aren't aware of the risks involved and the health problems they may be storing up for later in life.

Short-term effects

- Alcohol is a powerful drug and it affects the body and brain straight away. About five minutes after starting drinking, alcohol has reached every part of the body.
- Alcohol dries out (dehydrates) the body and lowers blood sugar levels.
- Alcohol dulls the brain. Although this may feel stimulating at first, it feels worse later on because alcohol is a 'downer' (or depressant) drug.
- Alcohol affects judgement. Research shows that the more convinced drinkers are that they can perform tasks well when drunk, the worse they really do.
- In large doses alcohol causes loss of coordination and slowing of movement, and can even lead to coma and death.
- Mixing alcohol with other drugs is extremely dangerous. This includes prescription and 'over-the-counter' (OTC) drugs such as sleeping pills, cough medicines or antihistamines, as well as illicit drugs such as cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine or heroin.

Long-term effects

Too much drinking can cause:

- stomach disorders like ulcers and gastritis
- cancer of the mouth, throat and gullet
- liver cirrhosis
- brain damage
- sexual difficulties
- high blood pressure
- problems with the nervous system like pain in the legs and arms.

For men, regular heavy drinking will:

- shrink your genitals
- lower your sperm count
- make you lose body hair.

For women, regular heavy drinking will:

- damage an unborn child
- increase your risk of breast cancer
- make you less fertile
- make your periods irregular.

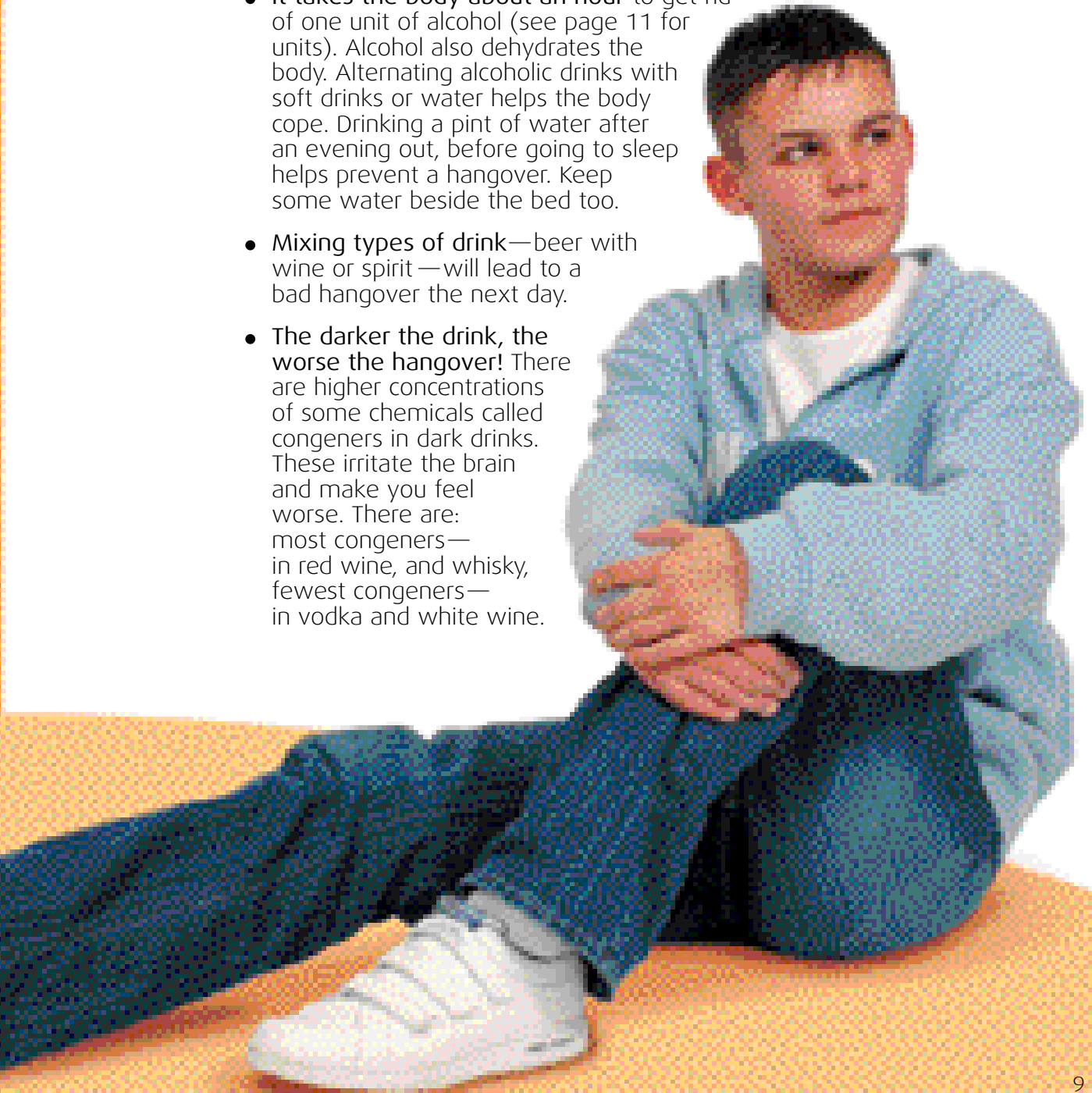
'If you have an alcohol problem and you drink every day, then obviously it will mess up your liver, but the effect it has on you really depends on how much you drink.'

13-year-old boy.



Alcofacts for a good night out

- **Drinking on an empty stomach means** that the body absorbs alcohol very quickly and you will soon feel drunk. Food slows this down, so eat something before going out.
- **It takes the body about an hour** to get rid of one unit of alcohol (see page 11 for units). Alcohol also dehydrates the body. Alternating alcoholic drinks with soft drinks or water helps the body cope. Drinking a pint of water after an evening out, before going to sleep helps prevent a hangover. Keep some water beside the bed too.
- **Mixing types of drink**—beer with wine or spirit—will lead to a bad hangover the next day.
- **The darker the drink, the worse the hangover!** There are higher concentrations of some chemicals called congeners in dark drinks. These irritate the brain and make you feel worse. There are:
most congeners—
in red wine, and whisky,
fewest congeners—
in vodka and white wine.



- **Women generally weigh less than men so alcohol affects them more**, and their bodies contain less water as a proportion of their weight, so it also affects them more quickly.
- **You will get drunk more quickly on fizzy drinks.** The bubbles in sparkling wine, or the gas in tonic water, ginger beer or soda water speed up the process.
- **Alcohol has no nutritional value** but it is high in calories:
1 alcopop = 1 pint of beer = 200 calories.
- Premixed spirits in bottles, known as Ready to Drink Spirits (RTDS), are commonly known as 'alcopops'.

Safety tips

You hope you will never have to cope with a serious situation, but it's important to make sure that your teenagers know how to keep safe. They need to know how to look after themselves if they're drinking, and what to do if someone is in trouble. After a night out, it's important that they get home safely and their friends do too.

- Never leave a drink around where someone could spike it with drugs.
- Don't mix drugs and alcohol.
- Never drink and drive or be a passenger with someone who has been drinking.
- Make sure there is money for a fare home.
- Keep with at least one friend when going home and never leave anyone on their own.
- If a friend becomes ill, very drowsy or unconscious, get adult help. If the friend has to be left, roll them into the recovery position—see 'First aid' on page 18.

In 2003/2004 there were 1,847 referrals to the Children's Hearing System in Scotland on the grounds of misuse of alcohol or drugs.

40% of 13- and 14-year-olds who have had sexual intercourse were 'drunk or stoned' when it first happened.



did you know...?

Recommended units

Talking about how much to drink with your son or daughter can be really difficult because alcohol does affect people differently. There are recommended limits for adults but there is no safe limit for young people because their bodies and brains are still developing.

Alcoholic drinks come in different strengths and are measured as a percentage of alcohol by volume (% abv). The higher the % marked on the label the stronger the drink will be. It is also important to know how large a drink is, as its volume and strength determine the unit value.

Drinks are measured in **units** of alcohol, and it's the number of units that matters. A unit is equivalent to 8gm or 10ml (1cl) of pure alcohol. You can work out the exact number of units in a drink by multiplying the volume of the drink by the % abv and dividing it by 100 if the volume is in centilitres (cl) or 1000 if it's in millilitres (ml).

For example

$$330 \text{ ml can lager with } 7\% \text{ alcohol content} = \frac{330 \times 7}{1000} = 2.3 \text{ units}$$

$$275 \text{ ml bottle alcopops } 5.2\% \text{ alcohol content} = \frac{275 \times 5.2}{1000} = 1.4 \text{ units}$$

Know your drink— how many units?

Type of alcohol	Unit of alcohol per drink
1/2 pint of standard beer (3.5%)	1
1 pint low alcohol beer	.5
1 pint of standard lager (4%)	2.3
1 pint of 'premium lager' (5%)	2.8
1 bottle of 'premium lager' (5%)	1.7
1 pint of Guinness, 'real ale' or strong cider	3
1 can of 'super' or special lager	4
1 pub measure (30ml) of spirit (whisky, gin, vodka)	1
1 standard bottle (275ml) of alcopop or pre-mixed spirit	1.4
1 bottle of spirit	30
1 glass (50ml) of fortified wine (sherry, port)	1
1 glass (175ml) of wine (12%abv)	2.1
1 bottle of table wine (12%abv)	9
1 litre bottle of table wine (12%abv)	12

Remember it's harder to judge measures at home. You may pour more than the standard pub measure!



Remember

On average, home measures are twice the usual amount than in a pub!

Recommended limits

No more than 3–4 units daily (21 weekly) for men.

No more than 2–3 units daily (14 weekly) for women.

Everyone needs at least 2 days a week without alcohol

These guidelines are for adults. There is no known 'safe amount' for under 18s.

Many young people think that beer and cider are weaker than other drinks. They need to be aware that a pint of beer or cider = at least 2 units of alcohol—usually more than twice as much as a pub measure of spirits.

Alcopops/ Ready to drink spirits

Knowing about alcopops and pre-mixed spirit drinks is very important because teenagers often think they are weaker than other drinks. They're not. Alcopops are attractive to young people because they are sweet and easy to drink, but alcopops do have a high alcohol content.

Some very young drinkers are choosing alcopops too. The makers say they are aimed at 18- to 30-year-olds but research shows that 56% of very young (11- to 12-year-old) drinkers choose them.

The alcohol content of alcopops varies from around 4-8% or more.

'They're so easy to drink.'

16-year-old girl.

Remember, alcopops contain at least 1 ½ units of alcohol and are **not weaker than other alcoholic drinks.**

'When you start drinking, at first you tend to drink cider because it's cheaper. You go for the drink that is cheaper and has more [alcohol] in it, but when you get older you start going on to drinks like alcopops.'

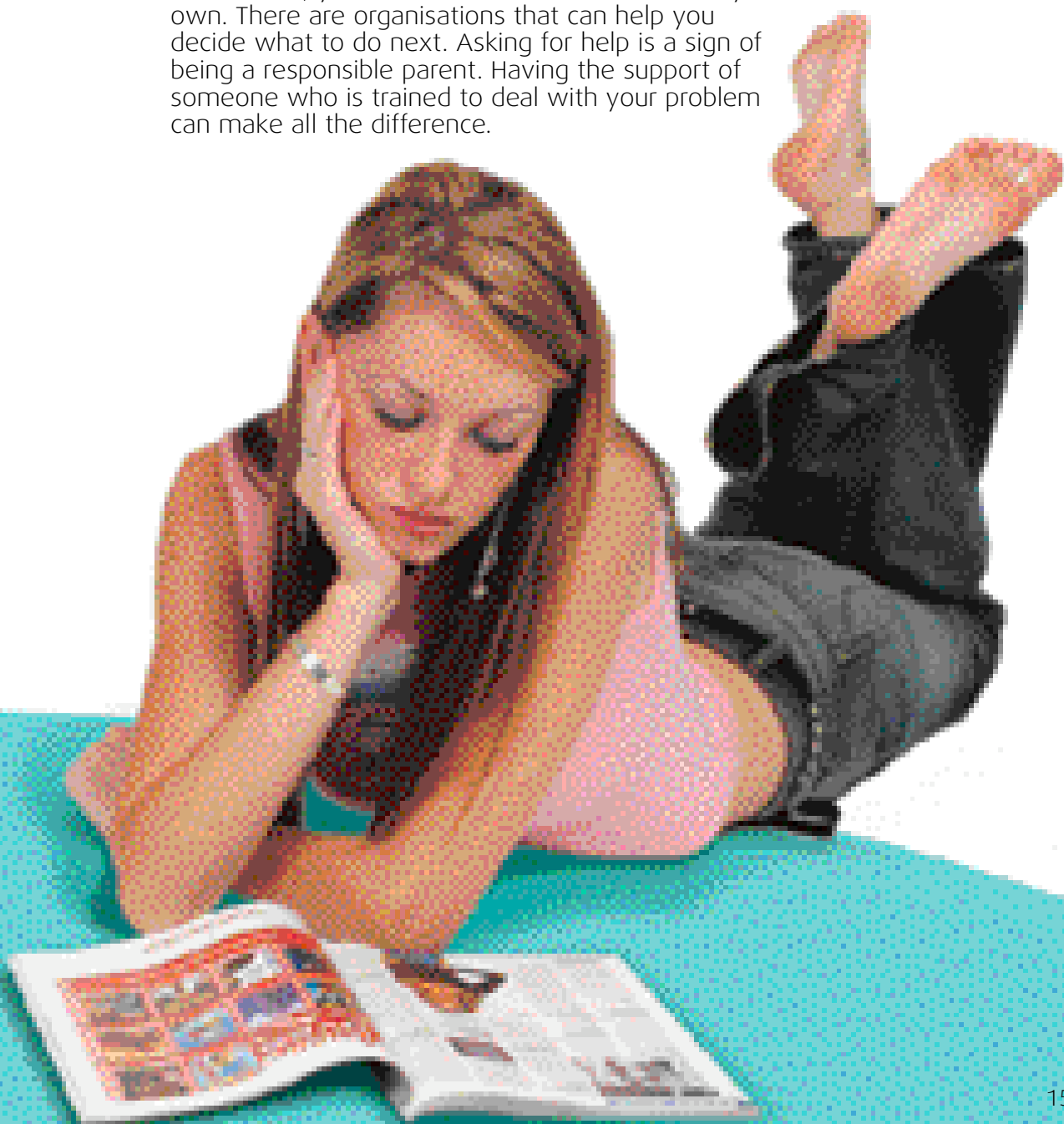
17-year-old girl.

What do I do if they come home drunk?

Don't panic! Do not over-react there and then. You will get no sensible response. Better wait to talk until the next day, when you have calmed down—and they have sobered up. For now, try to get them to drink some water or eat something before they go to bed. It will help them recover from a hangover.

You are not alone

Some young people do have problems with drinking. If you are worried, you don't have to deal with this on your own. There are organisations that can help you decide what to do next. Asking for help is a sign of being a responsible parent. Having the support of someone who is trained to deal with your problem can make all the difference.



With the help of a skilled and experienced alcohol counsellor you may find that you and your teenagers are able to talk and listen to each other more easily.

You can also telephone **Drinkline (0800 7 314 314)**. This line is completely confidential.

If your son or daughter comes home, or is found, in a highly distressed and confused state, don't automatically assume that they have drunk too much or taken drugs. Although incidents are rare, it could be that they have been drugged by a third party, and sexual assault may have taken place, even though they have no recollection of this happening.

If you think they may have been the victim of drug-assisted sexual assault, contact the police immediately.

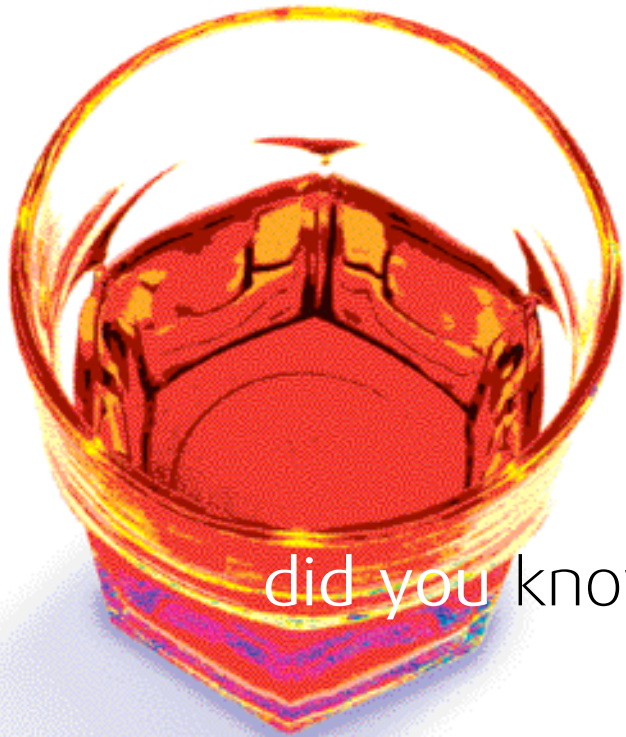
Always stress to older children that they should never leave drinks unattended, or accept drinks from strangers.

Alcohol and the law

- It's against the law to give alcohol to children under five years of age.
- It is against the law to sell alcohol to anyone under 18 years old.
- 16-year-olds are permitted to drink alcohol (beer and wine not spirits) in a pub with a meal.
- The police can confiscate alcohol from anyone under 18 drinking in a public place.
- It is against the law for an adult to buy alcohol from an off-licence on behalf of anyone under 18 years old.
- 14-year-olds, if accompanied by an adult, are allowed into the bar of a pub or hotel if they are eating a meal and if the premises are covered by a children's certificate, but are not allowed to buy, be sold, or have alcohol brought to them.

Offenders were found to be drunk in 30% of sexual offences, 33% of burglaries, 50% of street crime and 85% of crimes in pubs and clubs.

Alcohol related problems cost Scotland at least £1.1 billion a year.



did you know...?

Where to go for help

Drinkline

Tel: 0800 7 314 314
Open 24 hours
www.infoscotland.com/alcohol

Alcohol Focus Scotland

Tel: 0141 572 6700
www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

First aid

If your child seems seriously ill or is very drowsy or unconscious, you need expert help at once: **Call 999**.

It is important not to panic. Tell the emergency services clearly what symptoms your child has and what alcohol or drugs they've had, if you know.

Vital steps to recovery:

- don't delay
- don't leave them on their own
- if the child is unconscious, lie them face upwards on the floor and check that they are breathing normally (below).

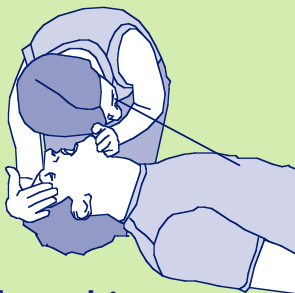
1. Air way

Open airway by tilting head back and lifting chin.



2. Breathing normally

Look, listen and feel for signs of normal breathing.

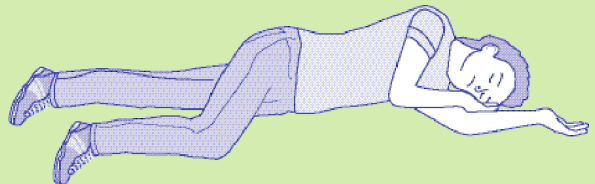


3. If they are breathing:

- place or help them into the recovery position (see opposite)
- call 999 for an ambulance, or get someone else to do it if possible, and stay where you are with the child
- keep them warm.

The Recovery Position

An unconscious person who is breathing but has no other life-threatening conditions should be placed in the Recovery Position.



Turn them onto their side. Lift the chin forward to an open airway position and adjust hand under the cheek if necessary. Check that they cannot roll forwards or backwards. Monitor breathing and pulse continuously until help arrives. If injuries allow, turn the casualty to the other side after 30 minutes.

If they are unconscious and are not breathing:

- get someone to phone 999 for an ambulance
- start emergency life support (see below).

Emergency Life Support

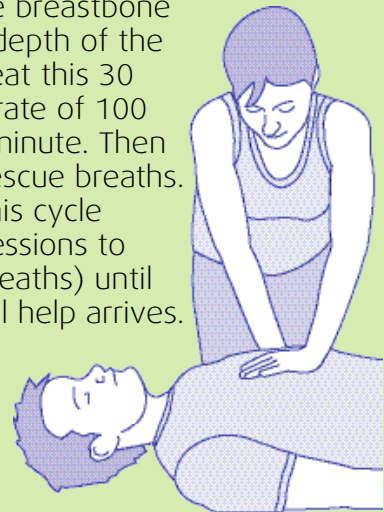
1. Open airway again

Remove any visible obstructions. Close the nostrils of the child with your forefinger and thumb. Give the child five initial rescue breaths. (Take a breath and place your mouth over their open mouth ensuring a good seal. Blow steadily into the mouth for about one second and watch the chest rise and then fall as air comes out). Repeat four times.



2. Perform 30 chest compressions

Find the centre of the chest and place the heel of one or both hands there (depending on size of the child). Position yourself directly above the chest and press down firmly to depress the breastbone by $\frac{1}{3}$ the depth of the chest. Repeat this 30 times at a rate of 100 times per minute. Then give two rescue breaths. Continue this cycle (30 compressions to 2 rescue breaths) until professional help arrives.



This is the basic emergency life support sequence for children (aged 1 year to puberty). For adult basic emergency life support omit the initial five rescue breaths and place both hands in the centre of the chest for chest compressions, thereafter follow the sequence detailed above.

This guide has been produced as part of a close collaboration between the Scottish Executive, NHS Health Scotland, Alcohol Focus Scotland and Barbara O'Donnell (National Alcohol Liaison Officer).

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