



**Alcohol
before 18.
What's
the harm?**

**Like
tobacco,
alcohol is
harmful.**

**A Guide for
Parents.**

BALANCE
Getting the
measure of alcohol



**Like tobacco,
alcohol is harmful.**

By the age 11, children are becoming increasingly aware of alcohol, and many will have tried it by 15. So it's a topic parents and carers need to be able to talk about.

Families have a big influence on their children. Parents can help their children to avoid alcohol harms by learning about alcohol risks for young people, understanding the myths, talking to their children about alcohol, agreeing rules and by being good role models.

Children learn about alcohol in school and see alcohol advertising everywhere. Start to talk to your child about alcohol before they move to secondary school and keep talking as they get older.

The medical advice is clear; it is healthiest and best for children to drink nothing before they are 18. And it is especially important they don't consume alcohol under the age of 15.

So what are the risks?

Alcohol is linked to 200 different diseases and injuries including heart disease, liver disease and seven types of cancer. It's harmful for adults - but the risks are even greater for under 18's whose minds and bodies are still developing.

- **Young brains continue to develop and change until the mid twenties.** Drinking alcohol before our children reach adulthood can change or delay the development of the logical, thoughtful part of the brain.

- **Alcohol can affect your child's mental health and affect how well your child does at school.** It is linked to stress, depression and self-harming behaviour.

- **Alcohol can lead to other risky, impulsive behaviour.** Young people who drink regularly are four times more likely to smoke and three times more likely to take other, illegal drugs. They are more likely to get hurt due to an accident or as a result of violence.

- **Children are smaller, which means alcohol's effects work more quickly.** Alcohol poisoning can result in young people being admitted to hospital or worse.

- **Children's bodies are still developing through the teenage years.** We know that drinking alcohol can affect their liver, bones, hormones and their growth.



Alcohol is the leading risk factor for death amongst 15-49 year olds in the UK.

So it's easy to see why more people are choosing to drink less or not at all. Alcohol consumption is down for adults and children.

Only 1 in 10 young people aged 11-15 years now drink regularly, down from 1 in 4 in 2001



Myths.

You might have heard some of the myths about alcohol and young people. Here are the facts.

Myth: Children who drink alcohol with their own family are less likely to binge drink.

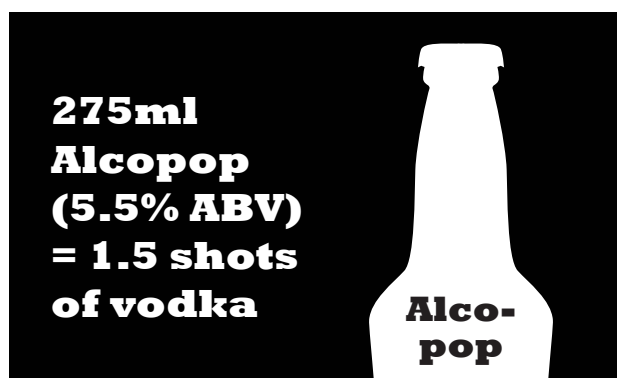
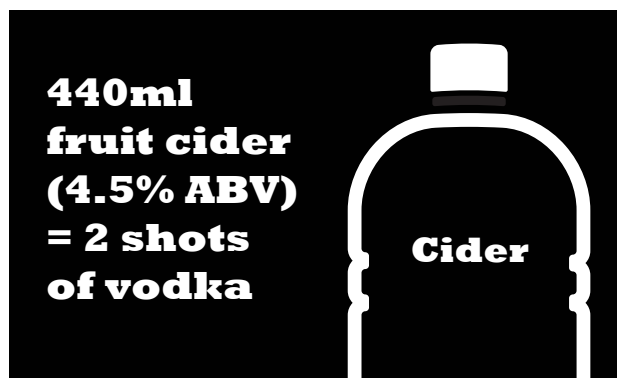
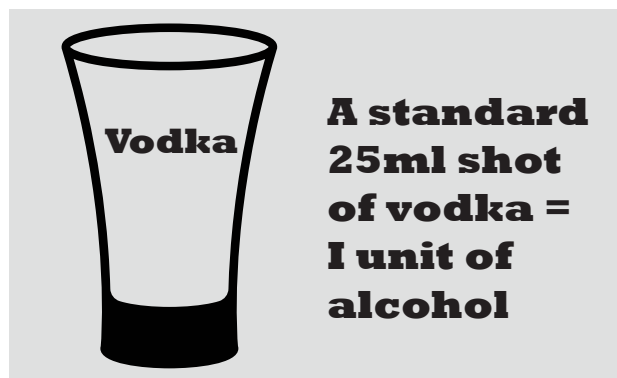
Fact: Children who begin drinking at a young age tend to drink more and are more likely to drink to get drunk. It's best for your child to delay drinking for as long as possible, preferably until they turn 18.

Myth: It's OK to give kids drinks like fruity ciders and alcopops – they're weaker than beer, wine and spirits

Fact: The truth is they all contain the same kind of alcohol. It's whether they drink at all and how much they drink that counts.

Myth: The French give their children alcohol and they don't have any problems

Fact: This is a widely held view but it is simply not true. France has a higher level of alcohol consumption and higher rates of binge drinking than the UK. France also has twice the rate of alcohol dependence than the UK.



Take some time out to talk.

As parents you have more influence than you think.

When parents don't allow their children (aged 11-15) to drink, 87% choose not to drink.

Friends are important too.

If children have friends who drink regularly then they are 10 times more likely to be a risky drinker themselves.

Talking about alcohol is important. A good time to chat might be when alcohol crops up on the TV. Talk openly, listen to your child - find out what they know, set rules and explain why it's important to wait until as old as possible and drink as little as possible.

Arm yourself with the facts. Alcohol is harmful and the risks are greater for young people than they are for adults because their bodies and brains are not fully developed.

Let your child know what your rules are. A warm and open approach to your children with clear rules and boundaries helps parents to talk about the tricky stuff.

Keep an eye out. Look out for signs that your child might be drinking secretly or having problems with alcohol. Make sure you know where they are, who they are with and that they know what time they need to be home. If they have been drinking find a quiet time, talk calmly, let them tell you what happened and explain why you are concerned and what the risks are. If you are concerned seek medical advice.

Summary of the official alcohol and health advice.

The most up to date advice to reduce alcohol harm is:

- In pregnancy, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all.
- An alcohol free childhood until age 18 is the healthiest and best option. Alcohol should never be consumed by children aged under 15 years.
 - But if children aged 15, 16 and 17 years choose to drink this should be supervised by a parent/ carer, never more than once per week and not more than 3 units*.
- For adults to keep health risks low it is safest not to drink more than 14 units per week and to spread drinking over 3 or more days.

1 UNIT IS EQUAL TO:



1/2 glass of wine



1/2 pint of beer



25ml of a spirit

*note the Chief Medical Officer Guidance on the Consumption of Alcohol by Children and Young People issued in 2009 referenced the adult daily limits for women (2-3units) and men (3-4units) which were contained in the adult guidance applicable at the time.

What about my drinking?

We all want to be good role models. Research tells us that children often notice what we as adults drink and can find adults getting drunk embarrassing or scary, rather than funny.

Alcohol misuse can run in families. If you or a close relative drinks too much your child may also be at increased risk from alcohol. It's worth thinking about your own drinking in the house and around your children.

Further support and information:

Find out what every parent needs to know about alcohol before 18 at
www.whatstheharm.co.uk

Family life and alcohol:

Al-Anon Family Groups provide support to anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking, regardless of whether that person is still drinking or not.

www.al-anonuk.org.uk

Adfam improve life for families affected by drugs and alcohol.

They provide information about family support services.

www.adfam.org.uk

Information for young people:

www.riseabove.org.uk www.talktofrank.com

Concerned about alcohol?

You can talk to your GP or contact NHS 111

Drinkline runs a free, confidential helpline for people who are concerned about their drinking, or someone else's.

Call free 0300 123 1110 (weekdays 9am–8pm, weekends 11am–4pm)

Alcoholics Anonymous 0800 9177650 (24hour, 7 days a week)