

Children and young people alcohol toolkit



BARNSELEY
Metropolitan Borough Council

Contents

Alcohol harm in the UK	3
Alcohol and underage drinking	4
Why young people may drink	5
What are the potential problems linked to Alcohol in children and young people?	8
Hidden harms	9
Children and young people's consumption	10
Protective factors that inhibit alcohol misuse in children and young people	12
Children and young people's alcohol use and stigma	13
How to support children and young people who are consuming alcohol	14
Alcohol support for children and young people	16

Information from this toolkit was obtained from: Drink Aware, NHS digital, FASD Network, Newbury-Birch et al. (2008), Department for Children Schools and Families Research Report.



Alcohol harm in the UK

Alcohol plays a significant role in our social lives and our economy. It provides employment, generates tax revenue and stimulates the night-time economy.

Although most people who drink do so moderately, alcohol consumption has doubled over the past 40 years. As a result, alcohol is the leading risk factor for deaths among men and women aged 15–49 in the UK, and there are more than one million alcohol-related hospital admissions every year.

Research indicates that the average age a person first tries alcohol is now 13. Alcohol can have serious effects on developing brains and bodies and leaving teenagers vulnerable to unsafe situations.

Drinking alcohol is seen as something teenagers are expected to do as part of growing up but starting to drink so young is more damaging than many teenagers realise.

Children can still be drawn to alcohol even though their first experience of it may be unpleasant. They may not like the taste or how it makes them feel, but they often persist.

People often characterised drinking when young as a 'rite of passage' or a bit of fun. However, three in ten young people who have drunk alcohol (30 per cent) have experienced a negative consequence of their drinking.

Studies have shown that parents significantly influence the attitude and relationship their child develops with alcohol. There is support available in Barnsley for any child or young person seeking help around their alcohol use or a family member or carer.

Alcohol and underage drinking – the law

Children and young people are advised not to drink alcohol before the age of 18. If they do drink underage, it should not be until they are at least 15 due to the associated health risks. For example, it can affect the development of vital organs and functions as well as leading to risky behaviour.

Young people from the age of 15 to 17 should not drink more than once a week and should be supervised by an adult or carer when doing so. They should not exceed the recommended adult weekly limit of 14 units.



If a person is under 18 and drinking alcohol in public, they can be stopped, fined or arrested by police.

If they're under 18, it's against the law:

- For someone to sell you alcohol
- To buy or try to buy alcohol
- For an adult to buy or try to buy alcohol for you
- To drink alcohol in licensed premises (e.g. a pub or restaurant)

However, if someone is 16 or 17 and accompanied by an adult, they can drink (but not buy) beer, wine or cider with a meal.

If they're 16 or under, they may be able to go to a pub (or premises primarily used to sell alcohol) if they're accompanied by an adult. However, this isn't always the case. It can also depend on:

- The specific conditions for that premises
- The licensable activities taking place there

It's not illegal for a child aged five to 16 to drink alcohol at home or on other private premises. This does not mean it is recommended. We strongly advise an alcohol-free childhood, as recommended by the Chief Medical Officers.

It's illegal to give alcohol to children under five years old.

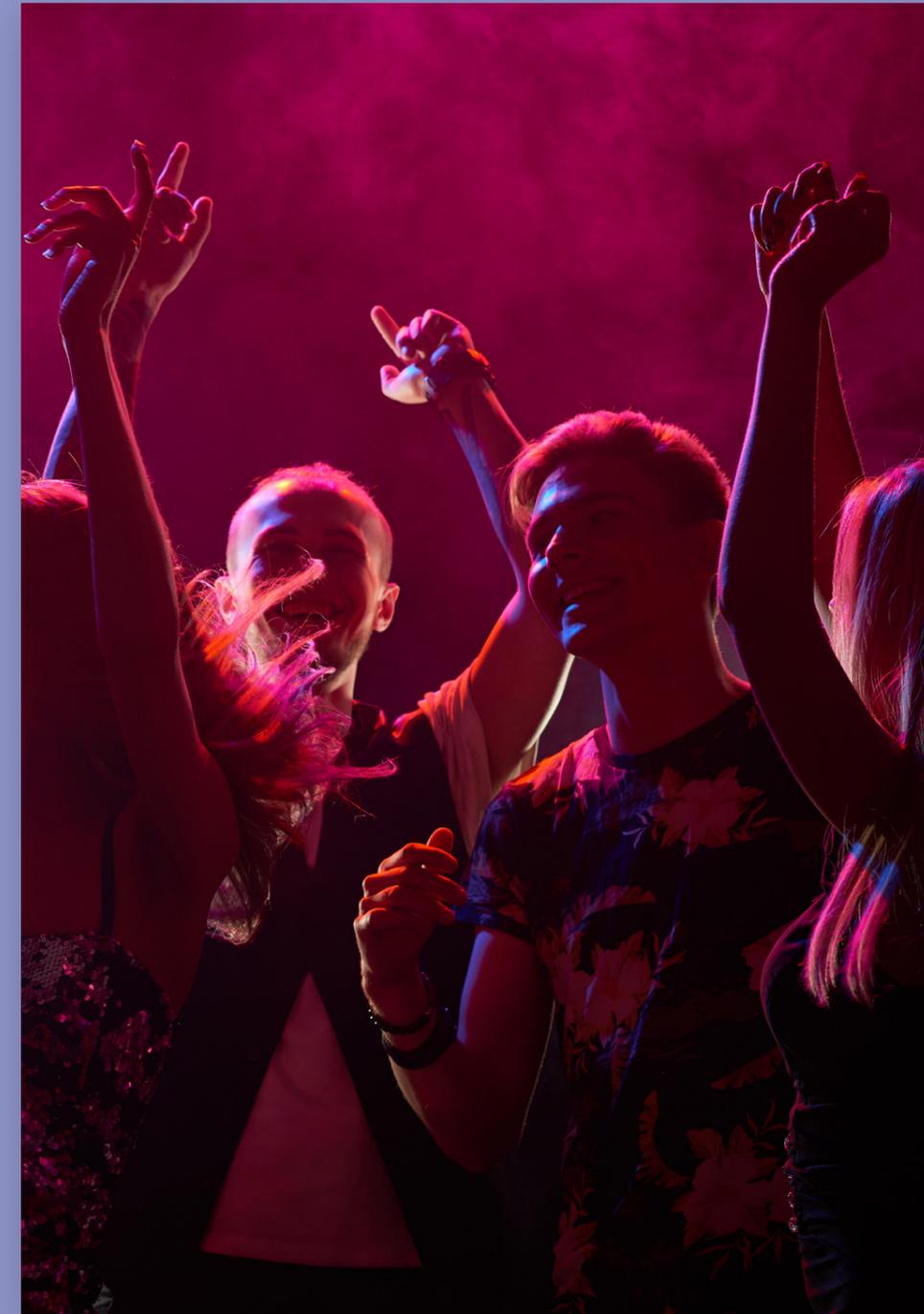
Why young people may drink

Risky behaviour is higher in puberty, and as such, young people can take risks deliberately, make a risk assessment, and decide it's worth it. This is because teenagers are struggling with two important changes to the brain during adolescence:

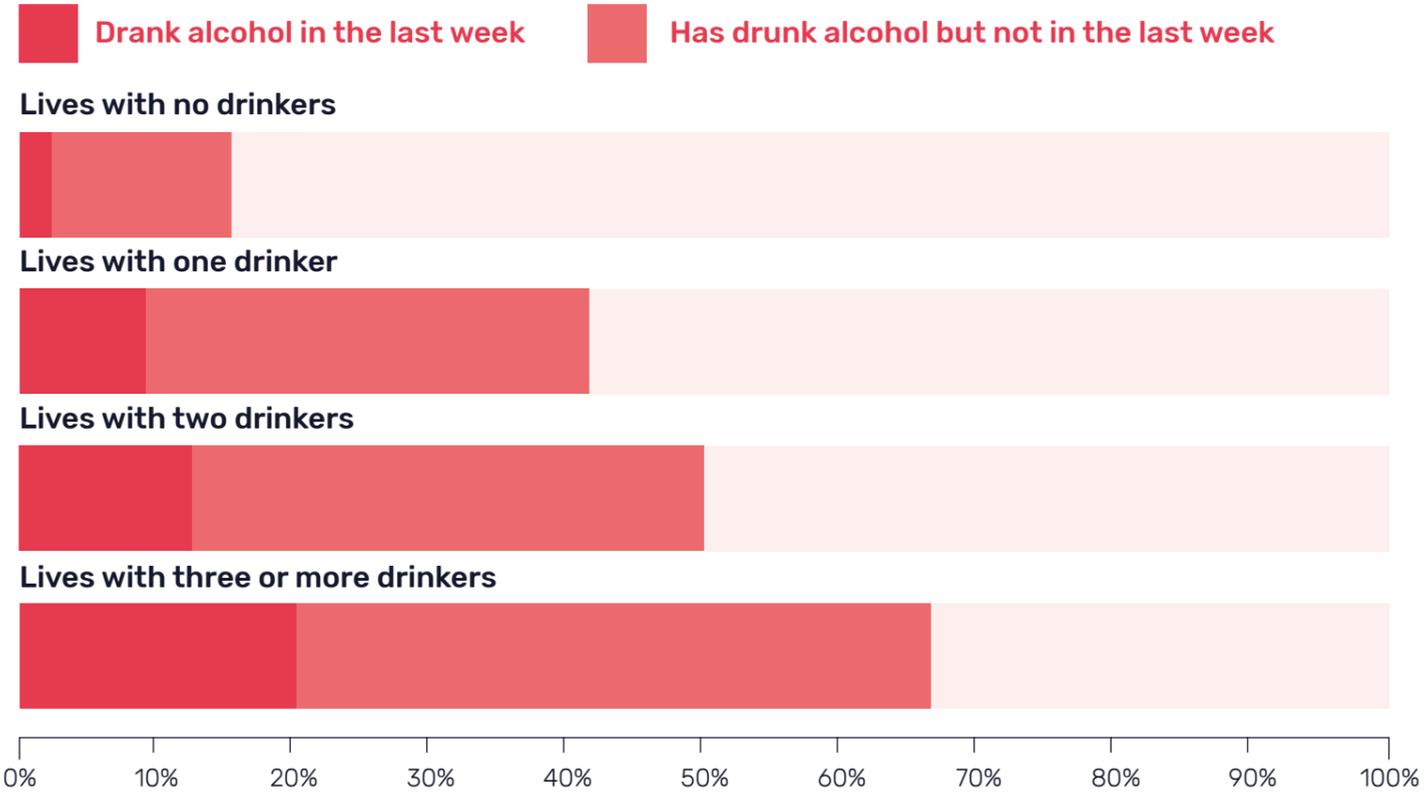
- Puberty switches on a capacity for strong emotions, impulsive behaviour and a need for sensations. It's why they'll take risks even when they 'know better'.
- The part of the brain that assesses risks, plans ahead, sees consequences and governs self-control is not fully developed until 16 or 17 years old and even then, it still needs fine-tuning well into the 20s.

They want to be like others - whether it is their parent, friends or older siblings, children want to fit in and be like people they look up to.

As parents, it is important to recognise that kids don't always do what you say; they do what you do. If a child's parents consistently drink or drink to excess around their children, it can set an example for the children, which they are likely to emulate.



From a very early age, children want to fit in. When they are young, their parents are their main influencers, but their focus shifts to acceptance by their friends as they age. If drinking is considered the norm in their social group, teenagers may want to join in to feel part of the crowd. As well as peers, there is also a need to consider older siblings. As older siblings are granted age-based privilege, whether it is staying up late or being able to drink alcohol, younger children are likely to want to copy, whether out of rivalry or due to a desire to be like them.



Young people see alcohol and drinking all around them. Social media plays a huge part in our teenagers and even younger children's lives. Through these channels, young people are bombarded with examples of drink and drinking. Social media can spread images and ideas rapidly, which can be risky incitements to act irresponsibly.



They may have problems with themselves, family, school or friends. One reason people drink alcohol is to try and cope with problems or stress, and children are no different. Young people have as many things as adults that could worry, scare or pressure them. We need to recognise that they might feel alcohol could be the solution to exam stress, not fitting in with peers or conflict at home.

Adolescents want to test you, your rules, your boundaries and their limits. Part of a young person's transition to adulthood is their need to be independent: they want to drop your hand and walk alone, to play in the park with friends without you. As they become teenagers, they want to smash through the barriers parents see as protection, but they see as confinement.

Children will push – sometimes, not because they want you to give way but because they need you to say no, so they can see the edge and feel safe inside it. Other times, their pushing is a sign that it's time to renegotiate the rules. Young people can often use the use of alcohol to test these boundaries with their parents.

Teenagers want to prove they are grown up. Teenagers aren't children; they're adolescents, and adolescents are apprentice adults – learning, but not quite there. They need to prove to themselves, to their friends and you that they are no longer kids. If drinking is for adults only, they'll show you and everyone else they are adults by drinking.

What are the potential problems linked to alcohol in children and young people?

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) - Drinking during pregnancy increases the risk of causing harm to the unborn child. Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is a term given for all the various problems that can affect a child if their mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy. Children who have FASD can have several physical, emotional, behavioural and neurological problems.

FASD is the most common non-genetic cause of learning disabilities in the UK. With an estimated 7000 babies born a year with FASD. However, the condition often goes undiagnosed or is diagnosed as autism or ADHD rather than being recognised as a presentation of FASD.

This condition is preventable only when there is no prenatal alcohol exposure. The UK Chief Medical Officer guidance changed in 2016 to recommend that **no alcohol be consumed during pregnancy and when planning a pregnancy.**



Hidden harms

The term 'hidden harm' is commonly used to describe the experiences of children and young people as a result of parental drug or alcohol misuse. Both children and parents/carers are often 'hidden' and silent and do not actively engage with services.

It is estimated that 1,317 children in Barnsley live with an adult who is dependent on alcohol, and we know only a small number (16 per cent) of these parents/carers are known to treatment services. Children of parents/carers who misuse alcohol are at an increased risk of physical and psychological health consequences and negative social and educational impacts.

For example, these include but are not limited to children experiencing physical neglect, abuse and poverty.

In addition, there is evidence to suggest that children of parents/carers who misuse substances are more likely to use and initiate the use of substances themselves at an early age, develop health-harming behaviours, and become involved in anti-social or criminal behaviours.

It is important that parents/carers follow the guidance around alcohol consumption and seek help for their alcohol use if it becomes a problem. Support is available for parent/ carers from our local specialist alcohol service – please see the finding support section on page 16.

Children and young people's alcohol consumption and individual harm

Drinking alcohol during childhood can have serious effects which include but are not limited to:

Alcohol poisoning

Anyone who drinks a lot in a short space of time can suffer alcohol poisoning. Children are especially vulnerable because of their smaller size. It starts by affecting your speech and balance but can affect your breathing, heartbeat and body temperature regulation leading to hyperthermia. It can also affect your gag reflex, putting you at increased risk of choking.

Accidents and injuries

Drinking alcohol can reduce a child's mental and physical abilities at the time, affecting judgment and coordination, which can lead to mishaps and sometimes accidents and injuries.

Appearance and side effects

Research shows that underage drinkers are more likely to suffer from a range of health issues, including weight loss, disturbed sleep, headaches.



Brain development and mental health

During childhood and teenage years, the brain is still developing. Alcohol can affect memory function, reactions, learning ability and attention span. Evidence also reveals that children who start to drink by age 13 are more likely to have worse grades, skip school and, in the worst-case scenario, be excluded from school.

As many as 43 per cent of young people who drink alcohol have reported that they are drinking to cope in some way, such as to cheer themselves up or to forget about problems.

Other substances and vulnerability

While excessive drinking by adolescents is a problem, it can be linked to other harmful behaviours, like taking illicit drugs. Compared to non-drinkers, underage drinkers are more likely to smoke tobacco, use cannabis or use other hard drugs.

Puberty is often a very tricky time for kids, both emotionally and physically. Their natural tendency can be to experiment and take risks is increased. Drinking alcohol can put them in vulnerable or dangerous situations. For example, among 10–17-year-olds who have had an alcoholic drink, 12 per cent have experienced severe harm due to their drinking. Examples include getting into trouble with the police, being a victim of crime, being taken to hospital or getting into a fight.

Liver damage

Drinking alcohol can increase the risk of developing liver disease, and young people who drink regularly are also at risk and start to damage their livers without realising. The warning signs only show after a few years. In Britain, significant numbers of people are now dying of alcoholic liver disease in their twenties.

Sexual health

Sexual activity is often linked with alcohol consumption in ways that are viewed as culturally acceptable. However, the relationship between alcohol and sexual health is increasingly cited as a cause for concern.

There is strong evidence that excessive alcohol consumption is associated with poor sexual health outcomes such as unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and sexual assault. The UK has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, and rates of abortions and STIs are increasing.

Drinking alcohol decreases inhibition, increases confidence and has a detrimental effect on the judgement that can influence decision making around sex and condom or contraception use. Alcohol use is also associated with the early onset of sexual activity That can later be regretted due to poor judgement/decision making when drunk.

Protective factors that inhibit alcohol misuse in children and young people

Protective factors are significant as they can ease risk factors. Our examination of the evidence about protective factors has shown that:

- The location of a young person's first drink may be important to future alcohol misuse. Children who first use alcohol in a home environment and learn about its effects from parents are less likely to misuse alcohol than those who begin drinking outside the home and experiment with peers.
- Delaying the time of a young person's first drink may reduce the risk of harmful drinking.
- Having adults who retain good relationships with a young person, characterised by appropriate levels of support and control, is likely to be protective.
- Controlled alcohol use is not in itself predictive of negative outcomes.
- Religious affiliation, especially attendance at religious services, may have a protective effect against alcohol consumption.
- Key factors that seem to buffer the adverse effects of alcohol consumption in children and young people include informed and supportive parental guidance about alcohol and a delay in the age of initiation into drinking.



Children and young people's alcohol use and stigma

Alcohol use disorders are more severely stigmatised than other forms of mental illness. Individuals experiencing alcohol use disorders are perceived to be more dangerous and unpredictable and are more likely to be considered weak instead of sick and needing treatment.

More 'weak-not-sick' attitudes were associated with weaker intentions to seek help from peers, family, formal sources, and the internet. The stigma associated with children and young people who misuse alcohol can lead to discrimination, social isolation, delayed problem recognition, and avoidance of professional treatment.

Children and young people are more likely to seek help and support from their peers. The stigma attached to drinking can lead a young person not to seek support from their peers over fears of being ostracised or being provided with unhelpful advice. Reducing the stigma of alcohol misuse increases the likelihood of a Young Person seeking help from family members and alcohol services. Seeking help early is crucial in reducing the long-term effects of alcohol misuse.

Additionally, young people can often be pressured into drinking alcohol by their peers, particularly in social settings; it's common for them to be shamed for turning down a drink and made to feel like they don't fit in. While drinking alcohol is seen as something teenagers do as part of growing up or distracting themselves from life's pressures, it can be more damaging than we think.

It should be acceptable not to drink, and heavy drinking at an early age should not be dismissed as youthful rebellion - the reasons teenagers start drinking can be complicated and varied.

How to support children and young people who are consuming alcohol

It is challenging to know when exactly using alcohol is more than just 'usual'. Not all drinking is problematic; it can be done in a safe and controlled environment. Dependency becomes more apparent when the young person spends most of their time thinking about, looking for or using alcohol. Alcohol then becomes the focus of the young person's life. They ignore their everyday work, such as not doing their schoolwork or stopping their usual hobbies or sports, such as dancing or football.

How do I know if there is a problem or dependency? Occasional use can be tough to detect. If the young person is regularly drinking, their behaviour often changes. Look for signs such as:

- unexplained moodiness
- behaviour that is out of character
- loss of interest in school or friends
- unexplained loss of clothes or money
- unusual smells and items



Remember, the above changes can also mean other problems rather than using alcohol.

- **Be a responsible role model.** Parents, carers or other role models will influence the young person's attitudes towards alcohol well before having their first experiences with them.
- **Talk openly and honestly about alcohol whenever a young person starts asking you questions about it.** This might include why people can enjoy it, such as socialising and relaxing, drawbacks such as hangovers and getting sick, and the risks posed by alcohol.
- **Make conversations about alcohol and safe choices part of the day-to-day rather than a one-off 'big talk'.** The more you talk about these issues in the family or support settings, the more young people will know they can come to you for information and support when they need to.
- **Help a young person to make safe and healthy decisions.** Be clear about the connections between drinking and self-confidence. Encourage the young person to strengthen their confidence and wellbeing in other ways such as exercise or sport, doing activities and hobbies they enjoy and spending time with friends and family.
- **Find out what you can** about the law and the health and safety risks associated with underage drinking. This will help you feel more confident about setting boundaries and talking to a young person about alcohol.

Finding support

Alcohol support for children and young people

Help is available for young people who may be experiencing problems with alcohol from our Young People's Substances Misuse Service. Call **01226 705 980** or email YPSMS@barnsley.gov.uk.

Advice and support for sexual health

Our 0-19 Public Health Nursing Service can offer advice and support to young people on sexual health matters. For more information, call 01226 774 411 or email 0-19healthteam@barnsley.gov.uk.

Our early help team can also offer support for children and young people up to the age of 19 and their families. For more information, please visit www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-families-and-education/early-help-for-families

Spectrum Integrated Sexual Health Service

Visit: spectrumhealth.org.uk/services/sexual-health/

Call: 0800 055 6442

Email: barnsley.sharp@spectrum-cic.nhs.uk

Alcohol support for parents or carers

Help is available for adults who may be experiencing problems with alcohol from Barnsley Recovery Steps. Visit www.humankindcharity.org.uk/service/barnsley-recovery-steps for more information about the support on offer.

