Alcohol: Advice and Information for Children and Young People
Having a drink can be enjoyable. It can help the party along. It can make it easier to start a conversation with that boy or girl at the party. Drinking is part of our national culture. Some communities and families have alcohol as part of their celebrations. Drinking has its positive sides. But... Having a drink can have negative consequences. It can damage your health, it can damage your physical and mental development, and it can make you forget all you know about how to be safe. It can make it easier to end up in situations you wouldn’t want to be in. Drinking too much can cause problems and get in the way of your friendships, relationships and career. Drinking has its downsides...

You can... Tell yourself that drinking too much is something other people do. Adults. Alcoholics. Those other kids. Or... You can make sure that you and your friends know it’s your issue too.

You can... Say: “What’s the worst that can happen?” Or... You can find out the facts first.

You can... Say: “I’ll learn by my mistakes.” Or... You can make sure that you don’t make any.

**It is against the law:**

- to sell alcohol to someone **under 18** anywhere;
- for someone **under 18** to buy alcohol, attempt to buy alcohol or to be sold alcohol in any circumstances or in any place at all (unless acting at the request of the police or a weights and measures inspector);
- for someone **under 18** to consume alcohol in any part of licensed premises with one exception – 16- and 17-year-olds accompanied by an adult may consume, but not buy, beer, wine and cider with a table meal in licensed premises;
- for an adult to purchase alcohol for a person **under 18** for consumption on licensed premises, except as above; and
- for an adult to buy or attempt to buy alcohol on behalf of someone **under 18**.
When you drink you do things you wouldn’t normally do. Sometimes this is a good thing – you have the courage to start talking to someone you like, your dancing might even be a bit better. But… Alcohol can also have a bad side. You might:

- say something to someone that you normally wouldn’t;
- get annoyed about something someone says or does – something that might not normally bother you;
- have a shorter temper; or
- lose your inhibitions about chatting someone up, but also lose your inhibitions about getting into a fight.

Drinking alcohol means you are less in control.

**FACT**

If you drink, you are more likely to get into a fight or have arguments with your family, friends or complete strangers. In a survey, more than a quarter of young people who had been drinking alcohol said they had got into an argument in the past 12 months and 12% reported getting into a fight.

Some 10,000 young people are admitted to hospital every year because of drinking. More than one in ten 15-16-year-olds had been involved in an accident or had an injury as a result of drinking.
Drinking and You

If you drink frequently, binge drink or drink in public places, you are more likely to be involved in fights, to get an injury from fighting, to commit violent offences or to carry weapons.

Myth:

“Only adults and alcoholics have a drink problem”. Actually ... you could experience problems if you drink too often, or drink to get drunk.

What You Can Do

Watch out for your friends. Be the one that doesn’t drink and does tell your mates when they’ve had enough. You can help get everyone home in one piece and remember all the stupid stuff that the drinkers said and did.
When you drink you can feel more relaxed. You can feel more comfortable with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or someone you’ve only just met. But… alcohol can also have a bad side. You might:

- go further than you want to;
- have sex without a condom;
- have sex with someone you don’t really want to and regret it in the morning;
- get into a dangerous situation with strangers;
- even get pregnant or catch a sexually transmitted infection; or
- experiment with drugs or smoking.

Alcohol can make you more vulnerable to a lot of bad things.

FACT

Girls who drink alcohol are more than twice as likely to have an unwanted pregnancy as their non-drinking friends. Both boys and girls are at increased risk of sexually transmitted infections when they have been drinking.

Drinking and You

If you drink frequently when you are young, you are more likely to be a daily smoker or have drug problems when you are older.

“It’s not my fault. I was wasted. I don’t remember.”
The key role of the Chief Medical Officer is to provide, for the Government and the public, advice without fear or favour. The Chief Medical Officer seeks out the best scientific evidence and uses this as the basis, not just for presenting the facts but also for making well-founded policy recommendations.

The Chief Medical Officer advises that:

- being alcohol free until you are 18 is the healthiest and best option;
- if you decide to drink, it should not be until you are at least 15;
- after you are 15, you should know that not drinking is the healthiest option and you should never drink any more than 2–3 units if you are female or 3–4 units if you are male on any single day; and
- if you are 15 to 17, you should not drink every week and never on more than one day a week.

If you don’t know what a unit is have a look at the diagram below.
Alcohol can be part of a good night. Family parties often include alcohol. A good night with friends can also involve alcohol. But... alcohol can have a bad side. It can affect your:

- **health** – and not just a hangover, but other stuff like liver disease, memory and brain damage, and make you feel depressed;
- **education** – drinking can make it difficult to concentrate on your work the next day, and even for days afterwards;
- **sport** – alcohol can affect your performance or your ability to train;
- **looks** – drinking can ruin your complexion and affect your weight;
- **sex life** – alcohol affects your sexual performance and your judgement; and
- **relationships** – drinking can mean you let your mates down or get into arguments and fights.

It can make you:

- **careless** – you might forget where you left your mobile phone, keys, bag or coat;
- **make bad decisions** – you might get into a car with a stranger or a driver who’s drunk; and
- **an embarrassment** – you might think you’re being fun but your mates don’t.
Drinking and you

If you drink frequently your performance at school or in sport is likely to suffer, as are your friendships and relationship with your family.

If you drink you are much more likely to do something dangerous and you are more likely to be a victim of crime.

Myth: “Everyone does it”. Actually… Fewer young people are choosing to drink these days. Many are finding better things to do with their time and their money.

What you can do

Choose to be the non-drinker. Put your time, energies, effort and money into something better.

To find out what is happening in your local area visit: www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople/DG_10016105

If you do something else instead of drinking, you could save money, feel better and look after your brain and body.
● **Get the facts.** Find out the truth about alcohol and drinking. Look at some of the sites on the back cover and get the truth not the myths.

● **Take control.** Set your own boundaries and make your own choices about whether to drink or not, when to drink, what to drink and how much to drink.

● **Talk.** Negotiate with your parents. Work out what is acceptable for both of you. Let them know where you are and how you will get home.

● **Think.** Ask yourself why you drink. If it’s because of problems, it is better to try to sort them out, not drown them. Alcohol won’t make them go away – you can ask for help.

● **Prepare.** If you’re not going to drink, think of what reason you’re going to give. Have the facts and your argument ready and be confident – it’s your decision.

● **Look out for your friends.** Tell them when it’s time to stop and make sure they get home safely. If the worst happens, phone an ambulance if it is serious and stay with them.

● **Choose not to drink.** Put your efforts and money into your interests, hobbies, sport or your mates.

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**And, if you decide to drink…**

● If you are 15 to 17, you should not drink every week and never on more than one day a week.

● If you are over 15 and a boy, never drink more than 3–4 units in one day. If you are a girl, no more than 2–3 units in one day. If you don’t know what a unit is have a look at the diagram on page 6 of this booklet, or see units.nhs.uk

● Drink lower-strength drinks.

● Make sure you know what you are drinking and how strong it is – don’t mix your drinks and don’t leave them unattended.

● Pace yourself, take sips not gulps, drink water and eat as well.

● Make sure you have a plan for getting home safely – get a taxi number or phone your parents.
WHEN IS IT A PROBLEM?

It is difficult to say when someone’s drinking has got out of hand, but here are some pointers to look out for and where to go for more advice or help:

- if you drink every week;
- if you drink to get drunk every time;
- if you drink to forget or deal with problems or because you feel sad; or
- if you drink to cope with situations or cannot cope without a drink.

- You may want to talk to someone or find out more information.
- Every area has support services for young people that know about alcohol and can offer you free support or advice.
- Check out the links to more information on the back page of this leaflet.

Alternatively, you can call Drinkline on 0800 917 8282.

Drinkline offers the following services:

- information;
- help to callers worried about their own drinking;
- support to the family and friends of people who are drinking; and
- advice to callers on where to go for help.

Drinkline is confidential and no names need to be given.
To find out what is happening in your local area visit: www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople/DG_10016105
To get advice on student life, relationships, travel and more visit: www.need2know.co.uk
To find out about young people’s real-life experiences of health and lifestyle visit: www.youthhealthtalk.org/Young_people_with_long_term_health_conditions/Topic/1874
To find out about first aid procedures visit: www.bbc.co.uk/health/first_aid/procedures_index/recoveryposition.shtml
To find health, wellbeing and lifestyle support and advice for young adults visit: www.thesite.org.uk
To access the Teen LifeCheck for 12–15-year-olds visit: www.nhs.uk/teenlifecheck
To get advice about sex and relationships visit: www.ruthinking.co.uk
For the facts about drugs visit: www.talktofrank.com

Have your say and get involved in the public consultation
All the consultation documents and ways to respond can be found online at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations
Email: alcohol.consultation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk
Post: Alternatively, you can write your answers and send them to:
DCSF Consultation Unit
Castle View House
East Lane
Runcorn
WA7 2GJ

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent by 23 April 2009.