



The Other Talk

Helping you have conversations with young people about alcohol and other drugs.

There are some tough topics every parent and carer need to address.

Talking about alcohol and other drugs is one of those tough topics – we call it ‘The Other Talk’.

This guide is designed to help you understand some of the common issues for young people and give you some proven tips for talking about them.

This guide covers:

1. What is The Other Talk?
2. Getting started
3. Influencing young people
4. The facts about alcohol and other drugs
 - Young people and alcohol
 - Young people, alcohol and the law
 - Young people and drug use.
5. The party dilemma
6. Planning a safe teen party



How you tackle this topic is important because:

- Research shows parents’ attitudes and actions have a huge impact on a young person’s drinking behaviour.¹⁻⁶
- Your rules around alcohol use can decrease the likelihood of your young person engaging in risky drinking.⁷
- Your decision not to allow your young person to drink is backed by [laws](#) in most states and territories.

What is The Other Talk?

People normally associate 'The Talk' with a conversation about sex, consent and relationships.

But there is another important talk that every family should have.

'The Other Talk' - an open conversation about alcohol and other drugs - is an important part of preparing a young person for situations where they may be around alcohol and other drugs.

You can start this conversation from an early age, to give your young person the right information and attitudes before they go to high school.

In fact, broaching this topic early means you can establish an understanding that there are no silly questions and no off-limit topics.



Getting Started.

1. Get the facts

To get the facts you need, use proven sources about alcohol and other drugs, like these pages, the [ADF's drugs facts page](#), and the Positive Choices' [Parent Booklet](#), so that you can help your young person with the most accurate information.

2. Be clear about your own beliefs

Get clear about your views on the use of alcohol and other drugs. For example, it's up to you whether your under 18 is allowed to drink alcohol or not.

To help you make this decision, check out the [Australian alcohol guidelines](#). They state that the safest option for people under 18 is not to drink.⁸

3. Stay calm

Keep things casual and relaxed. You could use media stories, social media posts or themes from popular movies or TV shows as a prompt to start a chat. Try to have the conversation in a quiet spot or when you're doing something together, like driving or making a meal. Remember, there's no limit to the number of conversations you can have.

4. Avoid judging or lecturing

Find out what your young person thinks about alcohol and other drugs. Ask what they'd do in different situations and listen to their opinions. Remain open and keep your body language and tone respectful - this can go a long way to encourage an open conversation.

Most importantly, listen to their opinions and ensure your young person knows they can talk to you about any concerns they have; at any time.⁹

5. Focus on their health

Focus on how you care about them and want them to be healthy. Don't use exaggerated statements about the dangers as it will make you appear less knowledgeable. Talk about why people may want to use alcohol and drugs as well as discussing the harms.

6. Set rules and consequences

Explain your views on alcohol and other drugs and use the facts to back them up. Establish clear rules and consequences for breaking them.

7. Help them to navigate tricky situations

Give your young person some strategies to help them get out of situations where they may feel pressured to use alcohol or other drugs. You could let them know that you are always available to pick them up if they are feeling uncomfortable. [More information on peer pressure and how to say no.](#)



A word of caution

No matter how tempting it may be, if you think your young person may have tried alcohol or other drugs, avoid accusations. Going through their room or bags, looking for evidence isn't recommended - it will only undermine trust.

Influencing young people.

It's not just what you say that makes a big difference, it is also what you – and others do – that shapes a young person's attitudes and behaviours.

The influence of others

Before your young person is faced with deciding to have their first alcoholic drink - or not - they will have formed attitudes and expectations about alcohol from parents, carers, family, friends, the media and the internet.

How much they are influenced by others is important when weighing up the risk of alcohol and drugs. Be aware of how susceptible your young person is to the influence of peers and the attitudes and behaviours of their friends.

What you can do

If you choose to drink, leading by example and role modelling lower risk drinking can have a powerful influence on your young person's drinking behaviour.¹

- Avoid saying you 'need' or 'deserve' a drink.
- Follow the Australian alcohol guidelines – no more than four standard drinks a day, and a total of no more than 10 standard drinks in a week to reduce long-term harm and alcohol-related injury. The same guidelines recommend people aged under 18 years should not drink alcohol at all.⁸
- Show you don't always need a drink to have fun or wind down.
- Build some alcohol-free days into your week.
- Find some healthy ways to manage stress like exercising, listening to music, streaming a show, or using other coping strategies like breathing techniques.
- Keep track of how many standard drinks you've had, even when you're not driving.
- Demonstrate that you can refuse a drink.

You don't need to tell your young person about your past experiences with alcohol and/or drugs (good or bad). However, if you decide to share your past, consider how much detail you want to give; whether your story will be beneficial; and, how you will respond to any questions.



The facts about alcohol and other drugs.

Information about alcohol and other drugs can change over time. For example, we now know a lot more about the long-term harmful effects.

The more you know, the better equipped you'll be to understand your young person's challenges, what they may encounter and the potential harms to their health.

Make sure you gather information from proven sources to support you to have The Other Talk.

To get you started we've gathered some key facts and stats as well as collated info on some of the more common drugs your young person may come across.

A resource for young people: [Alcohol, Drugs and the Impact](#).

Young people and alcohol

- 46% of 12 to 17-year-olds drank alcohol in the past year - according to the [Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug \(ASSAD\) survey](#)
- Young people are at greater risk of alcohol-related harm than adults.⁸
- Drinking alcohol can impact brain development up until the age of 25, resulting in affected attention, memory, and decision-making abilities.^{10, 11}
- The earlier a young person is introduced to alcohol and the more frequently they drink, can increase the likelihood of them becoming dependant on alcohol later in life.^{3, 12}
- Delaying drinking alcohol as long as possible can help to reduce harms. The Australian alcohol guidelines recommend delaying the first drink until at least 18 years old.⁸
- While young people are less likely to drink alcohol than past generations, when they do, they are likely to drink to intoxication, resulting in injuries, alcohol poisoning and sometimes death.⁸
- There is strong and consistent evidence that alcohol causes cancer, increasing the risk for mouth, throat, breast, bowel, liver and pancreatic cancer.¹³



Young people, alcohol and the law

Underage drinking

It's illegal for staff of licensed premises to serve alcohol to minors in Australia.

In most states and territories, it's also illegal to give alcohol to anyone under the age of 18 on private property, even in homes, without the young person's parent or legal guardian's permission.

Anyone who supplies alcohol (both adults and minors), to someone who is under 18 years of age can be charged and fined.

Find out about the laws that apply in your state or territory.

Drink spiking

Drink spiking is illegal in Australia and there are serious penalties, including fines and imprisonment.

Drink spiking is often associated with a drug being added to someone's drink. However, it's more common for a friend or acquaintance to add alcohol - or more alcohol than expected - to someone's drink.

There can be serious physical and mental consequences of causing someone to drink more alcohol than they're aware of.

Talk to your young person about drink spiking and highlight these points:

- avoid sharing drinks
- don't accept a drink from someone you don't know well
- many people have their drinks spiked by someone they know; to avoid this, bring or pour your own drinks
- keep an eye on your friends and their drinks.
- If they are ever in a situation where they think their drink has been spiked, they should:
- ask someone they trust to help get them to a safe place
- inform an adult at the party or management at a venue, so they can assist in finding the person responsible for drink spiking
- if they feel unwell or have been sexually assaulted, go to the nearest hospital
- call triple zero (000) or the nearest police station.

[More information on drink spiking](#)



Young people and drug use

The following data, from the [Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug \(ASSAD\) survey](#), shows how many young people aged between 12-17 years consumed a drug in the past year.

Cannabis	14%
Inhalants	13%
MDMA (ecstasy)	4%
Psychedelics	3%
Cocaine	2%
Performance or image enhancing drugs (e.g. steroids)	2%
Synthetic cannabis	2%
Amphetamines	1%
Heroin	1%

Use the following pages to find out about the effects of the more common drugs used by Australian secondary school students. You can also visit our [Drugs Facts](#) pages for more information.



Cannabis.



Cannabis affects everyone differently. Even the same person may have a different experience on separate occasions or over the course of their life. Some people report feelings of relaxation and happiness, while other people report anxiety and paranoia.

The effects include:

- feelings of relaxation and joy
- spontaneous laughter and excitement
- increased sociability or social withdrawal
- increased appetite
- impaired judgement
- dry mouth.¹⁴

A large amount, strong batch, or concentrated form can cause:

- temporary memory loss
- slower reflexes
- bloodshot eyes
- increased heart rate
- feeling detached from your own body, thoughts and emotions
- anxiety and paranoia.¹⁴

Long-term effects

Long-term effects depend on how much, and how often, cannabis is consumed and may also be affected by how the cannabis is used (e.g. vaporising a concentrate versus smoking the flower).

Heavy, regular use of cannabis could potentially lead to:

- tolerance of the effects
- dependence
- reduced cognitive functioning.^{15,16}

Cannabis use and mental health

Mental health issues associated with cannabis include depression, anxiety, and in some cases psychotic disorders.¹⁷

While cannabis may not directly cause mental health issues, people who frequently use it, or use large amounts, may have an increased risk of developing these problems¹⁷ – especially if mental health conditions run in the family.

It is important to note that young people who use cannabis may not experience mental health issues until later in life. Smoking cannabis regularly can increase a young person's likelihood of developing an anxiety disorder in adulthood.^{17,18}

Cannabis may also trigger cannabis-induced psychosis. Although this is uncommon, psychosis is a serious mental health condition, where people can lose touch with reality, have hallucinations and delusions, and become paranoid.

Once cannabis use is stopped, however, symptoms typically resolve.¹⁹

[More information on cannabis](#)

Note: The effects of **synthetic cannabis** are unpredictable and are typically more harmful than plant-derived cannabis.²⁰

Inhalants.



Inhalants are common household, industrial and medical products that produce vapours, which some people breathe in to make them feel intoxicated or 'high'.

The effects of inhalants are:

- an initial rush or 'high'
- nausea
- blurred vision
- headaches
- confusion
- delirium
- disorientation
- drowsiness
- seizures
- abnormal heart rhythm
- coma
- sudden death.²¹

If a substance is inhaled many times or a person uses a particularly strong inhalant, they can overdose, which can cause:

- nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
- irregular heartbeat
- chest pain
- hallucinations
- blackout, seizures and coma.²²

Some inhalants can cause long term harm such as cognitive dysfunction, kidney disease and growth impairments, especially if people use them heavily for a long period of time.²³

Sudden sniffing death can also occur, which is the result of heart failure from an irregular heartbeat, and usually occurs from strenuous activity after inhaling.²³

If you are concerned that your young person could be using inhalants, a guide for parents and families can be found [here](#).

[More information on inhalants](#)



Nitrous oxide (Nangs).



Nitrous oxide, known as ‘nangs’, is another type of inhalant that young people often experiment with. Nitrous oxide bulbs are relatively cheap, legal and readily available.

The drug is classified as a dissociative anaesthetic and has been found to produce:

- disconnection of the mind from the body (a sense of floating)
- distorted perceptions
- in rare cases, visual hallucinations.

The gas is inhaled, typically by discharging nitrous gas cartridges (bulbs or whippets) into another object, such as a balloon, or directly into the mouth.

Inhaling nitrous oxide produces a rapid rush of euphoria and a feeling of floating or excitement for a short period of time.²⁴

[More information on the effects of nitrous oxide.](#)



A word about vaping.

Vaping is when an electronic device (e-cigarette) is used to heat liquids and produce a vapour, which is then inhaled – mimicking the act of smoking.

Some people use e-cigarettes to reduce or quit smoking - however, there is not enough evidence to support this use and vaping is not officially recommended for smoking cessation.²⁵

Vaping devices come in a variety of shapes, sizes and styles. They can also be known by a range of other names including: electronic cigarettes, electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), e-cigs, ecigarro, electro-smoke, green cig, smartsmoker, vape, pens, pods, Juul, e-hookah.^{26,27}

Substances that can be vaped include: nicotine (which is the main drug in tobacco); nicotine-free 'e-liquids' made from a mixture of solvents, sweeteners, other chemicals and flavourings; and, other drugs such as THC (cannabis) e-liquids.²⁸

While it is illegal to sell or purchase e-liquids containing nicotine in any form in Australia, nicotine-free vaping devices and e-liquids can be legally sold and purchased in most states and territories.

Although nicotine e-liquids are more harmful (nicotine is a toxic substance), nicotine-free e-liquids still contain a wide range of chemicals, additives and flavourings which can be potentially hazardous. The long-term health consequences of these substances are not yet fully understood.²⁹

There are concerns that vaping products may normalise smoking and attract young people, with companies glamourising their products to appear cool or fun and using sweet flavours, such as candy or fruit, which are more likely to appeal to younger people.³⁰

[More information on vaping](#)



MDMA (Ecstasy).



MDMA is usually swallowed in tablet or capsule form, but it can also come as a powder or crystal.

The pills come in different colours and sizes, often printed with a picture, symbol or logo. Two pills with the same logo/symbol, however, may have different effects — they can come from different sources and have different ingredients.³¹

Some pills may only contain a small amount of MDMA or none at all, with other drugs and ‘fillers’ often used instead. This makes it hard to know what reactions to expect or if there will be negative side effects.

Just because a pill has the same logo/symbol as another pill, does not guarantee they have the same ingredients or will cause the same effects.

The effects of MDMA include:

- extreme happiness
- feeling energetic and confident
- enlarged pupils
- jaw clenching and teeth grinding
- heightened senses (sight, hearing and touch)
- excessive sweating and skin tingles
- muscle aches and pains
- reduced appetite
- fast heartbeat
- increased blood pressure
- dehydration
- heat stroke
- drinking excessive amounts of water (which can cause death).^{22, 31-33}

A large amount or strong batch of MDMA can cause:

- perceptual changes, such as hallucinations
- out-of-character irrational behaviour
- anxiety
- irritability, paranoia and aggression
- vomiting
- high body temperature
- racing heartbeat
- convulsions.³¹⁻³³

[More information on MDMA](#)



A word about new psychoactive substances (NPS).

New psychoactive substances are designed to mimic established illicit drugs, such as cannabis, cocaine, MDMA and LSD. They come in the form of powders, capsules, pills, and dried herbs that have been mixed with man-made chemicals. These drugs often come in branded packages and are sold online and through adult stores and some tobacconists.

Given how rapidly new drugs are emerging, it's difficult to know the common effects and what dose causes certain effects.³⁴ There have also been a number of reported deaths from NBOMes (N-methoxybenzyl), which are sold as synthetic LSD and are sometimes included in MDMA (ecstasy) pills.

The laws surrounding synthetic drugs are complex and differ between states/territories and federal law. These laws are also constantly changing, so a drug that was legal to possess yesterday, could be banned tomorrow.

The effects of NPSs vary depending on the type of drug. [More information on New Psychoactive Substances.](#)



The Party Dilemma - 'yes' or 'no'?

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There's a party on the horizon and your young person wants to go – because 'everyone else' is going!

But, how do you know whether to say 'yes' or 'no'?

You might have concerns about who is attending, who is supervising and if alcohol will be provided.

Try these tips to help you make an informed decision.

Contact the host

First find out what sort of party it's going to be.

Some good questions to ask the host (parent/guardian) are:

- what are the ages of the attendees?
- will there be supervision and how many adults will be supervising?
- will food be provided?
- will there be alcohol at the party? (make sure you let the host know if you give permission for your young person to drink alcohol or not)
- are there plans for preventing gate crashers?
- when will the party start and end? (so you can organise safe transport home.)³⁵



Give your young person safe partying tips

If you do say ‘yes’ to a party, it’s the ideal time to have The Other Talk and them with knowledge and techniques to reduce potential harm.

Make your views on alcohol and drugs clear and help them to say ‘no’

If you don’t want your young person to drink alcohol at a party, make sure you let the host know.

You can brainstorm ways of saying ‘no’ to alcohol and drugs with your young person, like having a good excuse ready: ‘I’m playing in a big game tomorrow’ or ‘I’m on antibiotics’. Work together to come up with excuses that aren’t embarrassing. They can also just hold any alcoholic drink they are given and put it down later.

[More information on peer pressure and how to say no.](#)

Have a plan for the night

Agree how your young person will get home, to ensure they don’t get into a car with a driver who has been drinking, is affected by other drugs or doesn’t have a licence.

You can also help them develop a plan with their friends around what they will do if they lose each other, such as nominating a meeting

place, having phone numbers written on a piece of paper in case phones get lost or batteries die, and who to call in an emergency.

Let your young person know you are always available to pick them up if they feel unsafe.

Encourage them to stay with their friends

Talk about why it’s important to stick with their friends, and let their friends know where they are going, what they are doing and who they are with, if they do leave them.

Discuss how your young person can look after their friends. You could talk about how a fight could be defused and what to do if someone becomes intoxicated or unwell.

It’s important to encourage your young person to look after a friend who is intoxicated by staying with them, putting them on their side (recovery position) in case they vomit, and calling triple zero (000) if they pass out or are in trouble.

Let them know it’s OK to call you or triple zero if they are scared or affected by alcohol or other drugs and that an ambulance will not call the police if someone has been underage drinking or taken drugs.

More information on how to manage a drug emergency.

Planning a safe teen party.

So, the party is going to be at your place . . . use the safe party planner to help you have a conversation with your teenager about how their party will be organised and managed.

A clear understanding about all the things listed on the planner can help make sure everyone has the same expectations and has a good time.

When filling in your planner, there are a number of things to consider, including whether you

will provide alcohol, allow smoking or what you would do if drugs were brought to the party, for example would you ask the person to leave?

The ADF has more information on:

- [Secondary supply laws](#)
- [Planning a safe party](#)
- [Safe partying tips for schoolies](#)
- [Safe partying guide for young people](#)
- [Safe partying tips for adults.](#)



Serving alcohol

If you provide alcohol at a party for young people, you should:

- tell parents/legal guardians ahead of time
- make sure no under 18s are served or given alcohol - unless you are following your state or territory's **secondary supply laws** and have their parent's/guardian's explicit approval
- set up an agreement between yourself and your young person about alcohol and adult supervision
- only make alcohol available from one area and have a responsible adult serving who is not drinking alcohol
- control how much alcohol is drunk and provide low-alcohol drinks and good non-alcoholic options
- avoid drinks like punch that could be easily spiked
- ensure food is readily available for all guests
- avoid serving salty snacks as they make people thirsty and could cause them to drink more
- plan for guests to sleep over if can't get home safely.

Intoxicated guests

Consider what you will do if someone is intoxicated.

Intoxicated guests can increase the risk of accidents, injury, damaged property and violence occurring. As the host, you have the right to send the guest home – it's a good idea to organise transport to make sure they can get home safely.



Smoking

You may also want to set some ground rules about smoking, especially if the party is being held in your home.

Transport

You'll need to make sure guests can get home safely because young people may not be able to make this judgment call. It's a good idea to:

- find out how your guests are getting home and who is driving (if a guest has been drinking, they shouldn't be driving)
- encourage parents/carers to pick up guests at the end of the party
- encourage guests to use a taxi, rideshare or get a lift with a driver who won't be drinking.

Communicate party rules to guests

Once all of these rules have been discussed with your young person, make guests aware of the rules too. A good way of doing this is to outline them on the party invitation.



Safe Party Planner.

PRE-PLANNING

My party is on [date] _____

Start time _____

Finish time _____

Budget _____

Theme/type of party _____

Dress code _____

Venue _____

Venue manager's contact details

Have you found out about the venue's insurance? Yes / No

What are the noise restrictions?

Is the venue easy to secure against gatecrashers? Yes / No

Is the venue easy to find and is there good parking for parents/carers? Yes / No

INVITATIONS

Written SMS Email

Social sites Other

GUEST LIST

Total number _____

Who is managing RSVPs _____

Have you discussed if there's anyone who should not be invited?

Who needs to be told about the party beforehand?

Neighbours Guests' parents

Police Other _____

ENTERTAINMENT AND FOOD

What will make the party fun?

What food will be served?

Other

ALCOHOL

Will alcohol be served at the party? Yes / No

If yes, have you considered:

- The Australian alcohol guidelines and secondary supply law?
- How to avoid people getting drunk and accidents?

DRUGS

Will smoking be allowed? Yes / No

What will happen if illegal drugs are brought to the party? Will they be confiscated? Will you ask the person who brought them to leave?

TRANSPORT

Who will make sure that safe transport for the guests is arranged after the party?

If any guests can't get home safely where will they sleep?

GATECRASHERS AND SECURITY

How can gatecrashers be prevented from entering?

Are any locations off limits to guests? And if so, how will these be marked/made clear to guests?

Where will pets go to keep them safe during the party?

Who will be the adult supervisors?

How will emergency vehicles easily access the party if necessary?

Other


PARTY RULES

Are there any other rules that need to be agreed to ensure everyone has fun on the night?



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 **druginfo.adf.org.au**

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