

## ALCOHOL AND YOUNG PEOPLE .... WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ?

"IT'S ONLY ALCOHOL"

"IT DIDN'T DO US ANY HARM."

"IT'S A RITE OF PASSAGE."

"KIDS ARE EXPECTED TO EXPERIMENT."

Alcohol is a huge part of kiwi culture and it would be hard to find any social gathering where alcohol does not play a significant role. Be it a christening, wedding, funeral, birthday party or dinner party, our kids see that alcohol is usually there AND often consumed in excess. Is it any wonder that they regard alcohol as important to their gatherings and celebrations as well?

Although experimenting with alcohol and other drugs can be common among teenagers, it's not always safe - or legal. So it's important to start talking about alcohol and other drugs with them from an early age and to keep talking about it as they grow up. As a parent you have a major influence on your teenager's drinking behaviour and you can help prevent them from drinking alcohol or from its' harmful use. Your influence on your their attitudes and decisions about alcohol is greatest before they start drinking.

Being such a common product it is easy to forget that alcohol is also a depressant drug that may cause serious side effects, particularly for young people. While small amounts of alcohol may be social and fun – larger amounts can be dangerous and even fatal. Alcohol affects young people differently to adults because they are still developing - physically, mentally, and emotionally. It affects the brain's ability to function efficiently and perform complex tasks such as driving, operating machines etc. This is particularly important for teenagers while they learn some of these tasks.

**EARLY DRINKING** Young people are often pressured to start drinking socially but the earlier they start the greater the chance of problems later. Research has found that **young people who started drinking alcohol before the age of 14 were more than 5 times more likely to have problems with alcohol addiction or abuse, compared to those who first used alcohol at age 21 or older.**



**THOSE UNDER 15 YEARS OF AGE ARE AT THE GREATEST RISK OF HARM FROM DRINKING AND NOT DRINKING IN THIS AGE GROUP IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT.**

**THE LAW AND SUPPLY OF ALCOHOL TO MINORS** The minimum legal age for purchasing alcohol in New Zealand is currently 18 years, but there is no legal drinking age in this country. It is however illegal for anyone under the age of 18 years (a minor) to buy alcohol. Under the new Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012, it is also illegal to supply alcohol to a person under 18 years of age unless:-

- **the supplier is the parent or legal guardian of the minor - and the alcohol is supplied in a responsible manner,**
- OR**
- **the person supplying the alcohol has the express consent of the parent or guardian of the minor (as defined in the Care of Children Act 2004), and supplies the alcohol in a responsible manner.**

Parents are encouraged to talk with other parents about alcohol and their kids. As 'a person' who has been given express consent to supply alcohol, (e.g. a parent who is organising an occasion), consideration should be given to responsible supply and hosting practices such as food provision, non-alcoholic options, the strength of alcohol supplied, arrangement for transport and the nature of the occasion. (See the "Parties" section for more ideas).

**YOUNG DRIVERS** Drivers under 20 years of age are subject to a zero-alcohol level. This means they must not drink any alcohol or they face serious penalties. For young drivers the task of driving is more demanding than for experienced drivers. Alcohol reduces your ability to pay attention when you are driving - even when you have had only a little to drink. As young drivers have to spend more of their attention to the driving task than experienced drivers, the effect of alcohol on their driving performance is greater.

**FOR YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 18 - THE SAFEST OPTION IS TO DELAY DRINKING FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.**