Alcohol Use and Well-Being in Teens A guide for caregivers



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Although the legal drinking age in Canada is 18-19 years, many teens use start to use alcohol at younger ages.

It's normal for parents and caregivers to worry about their teens using alcohol. By understanding why teens choose to drink and how this impacts their well-being, you can help support your teen in making healthy, informed choices surrounding alcohol.

Drinking patterns in teens

In Canada, one

standard drink

contains 13.5

grams of alcohol.

Although teens

frequently than

consume more

alcohol at a time.

adults, they tend to

drink less

of students in Gr. 10-12

report having engaged

in binge drinking

Underage drinking is quite common. On average, Canadian youth first try alcohol around 13 years old.

Quantity matters

142ml or

5 ounces of wine

(12% ABV)

exactly what's in their drink.

341ml or 12 ounces

of beer or cider

occasion.



% of students who reported using alcohol in the past year

43ml or 1.5 ounces

of spirits

(40% ABV)

Sometimes, this happens because teens don't know

Teens are also more likely to purposely engage in binge

drinking, which involves consuming 4-5 drinks on one

Factors that can impact teens' alcohol use

Every teen makes different choices about alcohol use. A wide range of factors can influence their decisions.



Individual

- · Older teens are more likely to use alcohol.
- Teenage boys may be slightly more likely to drink compared to girls, particularly bingeing. However, alcohol consumption in teenage girls has been on the rise in recent decades.

Family

- · Teens are more likely to drink when parents express positive attitudes toward alcohol, or set fewer rules about alcohol
- environments (e.g., financial struggles) may push teens to

Peers

- · Oftentimes, teens drink in order to fit in with their peers or to try to gain popularity.
- Teens may consume alcohol or binge-drink due to peer pressure, even when they have no desire to drink.

- Teens may drink more when they see partying portrayed as a normal, fun activity in TV shows /movies and on
 - Teens are frequently exposed to ads for alcohol, which can make drinking seem desirable.

social media.

Helping teens navigate alcohol use



Open communication

Rather than avoiding and condemning the topic of alcohol use, try to have honest discussions about the risks of drinking. Teens are more receptive to these conversations when parents show an open

mind and a non-judgemental attitude.

Set clear rules and boundaries

Establish clear rules about drinking, both inside and outside of the house. Try to help teens understand why they exist by focusing on the facts.



Model healthy choices



Teens pick up on the drinking habits of their parents. It's important to show them what it means to have healthy drinking behaviours. If you drink in front of teens, follow household

rules, consume moderate amounts, and don't engage in risky behaviours such as drinking and driving.

Consider teens' perspectives

Try to keep in mind that teens often face peer pressure and worry about fitting in, which can motivate them to drink against their wishes.



Listening to their concerns and helping teens focus on their own preferences can promote positive decision-making

Food for thought

Some examples of neutral, open-ended questions that help start the conversation on alcohol with teens:

- When I was your age, I didn't know the amount of alcohol in different drinks. Have you learned about this before?
- Have you ever talked about drinking with your friends? How did those conversations make you feel?
- · That movie we watched the other night showed some teens partying and drinking. What did you think of that scene?



Resources

Drug Free Kids Canada

https://drugfreekidscanada.org/

A Parent's Guide to Teen Parties

 https://www.healthychildren.org/English/agesstages/teen/Pages/A-Parents-Guide-To-Teen-Parties.aspx

Substance Abuse Support Services in Canada

· https://www.canada.ca/en/healthcanada/services/substance-use/get-help-problematicsubstance-use.html

The spectrum of risk

Not all alcohol use is created equal. Understanding the level of risk associated with different drinking patterns can quide constructive conversations about alcohol use, and help caregivers know when to get outside help from professionals.

Stressful home

family conflict,

turn to alcohol.

higher risk

Trying a drink Drinking once a month to "get buzzed" supervision with friends

lower risk

Gettina drunk several times a month, with slight impacts on daily activities

Drinking daily or bingeing several times a week. Alcohol use feels out of control, and gets in the way of health, school, and social relationships

· Frequently smelling of alcohol and appearing intoxicated, and having deteriorated hygiene

 Neglecting daily responsibilities or skipping school to use alcohol

Warning signs of alcohol use problems

- · Talking about alcohol frequently, in a positive way
- · Becoming angry, upset, or frustrated when access to alcohol is restricted

Alcohol use and teens' well-being

Frequent and/or heavy drinking in adolescence is linked to negative outcomes in several domains:

cognitive



- Reduced attention span
- Impaired short- and longterm memory
- Lower organization skills
- More impulsive actions
- Learning difficulties

emotional 🚠

- Heightened anxiety, depression, and loneliness
- Embarrassment or reduced self-esteem
- emotional control

social

- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Increased conflict with loved ones
- More conflict in dating relationships



- Difficulties sleeping
- · More risky behaviours (e.g., driving under the influence or unprotected sex)
- Use of additional substances (e.g., cannabis)





Drinking can trigger or worsen mental health symptoms



Teens struggling with mental health symptoms may cope by using alcohol





- Mood swings and lower