

## Is there a correct age to let children drink alcohol?

This is a frequently asked question. The first thing to point out is that there is a world of difference between sips and whole drinks. Many parents/carers choose to let their child have a small amount on special occasions to help them feel part of the event and to stop the idea of 'taboo' and so avoid experimentation without them knowing.

Interestingly, research is showing that children who are allowed small amounts or sips are more likely to come from families where parents/carers provide:

- stricter alcohol-specific rules
- stricter monitoring of the child's activities
- more consistent parenting practices
- more positive family relationships

Young people from these families were found to have:

- fewer substance-using peers
- greater peer disapproval of any substance use

What we do know is the more relaxed you are around alcohol with your children at home, the more likely children are to drink alcohol outside of the home, where risk taking is likely to take place. If teenagers drink whole drinks regularly under the age of 15, they are more likely to smoke, use other illicit substances and not do so well at school – it makes sense really, if they're out partying, they're not going to be home doing their homework and revision!

The official response to this question comes from the Scottish Chief Medical Officer and his advice for children and young people in Scotland is that an alcohol free childhood is the healthiest and best option.

We would encourage parents/carers and young people to delay the onset of drinking alcohol until at least 18 years of age, but we appreciate that this is ultimately a decision that will be made jointly by parents/carers and young people based on individual situations.

### **Top tips to delay drinking include:**

- Good communication and discussion between young people & parents/carers
- Clear messages and boundaries with no "scare tactics"
- Good monitoring and supervision especially in relation to where young people are and who they are with
- Involvement in hobbies and sports which could include activities at school or in the community

Parents/carers should be aware that it is an offence for an adult to knowingly purchase alcohol for someone under the legal drinking age, this is called "buying by proxy" and is designed to stop children and young people asking an older sibling or friend to buy them alcohol.

Visit [www.meetthehendersons.org.uk](http://www.meetthehendersons.org.uk) for more information on alcohol and young people or contact [heather.wilson2@nhs.net](mailto:heather.wilson2@nhs.net) from the Aberdeen City Alcohol & Drug Partnership.

This short feature has been adapted from the Alcohol Education Trust Newsletter for parents, September 2015 edition. To read the article in full you can visit <http://www.alcholeducationtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/parnlsep15.pdf> (Be aware that advice for those under the legal drinking age differs for Scotland and England)