

GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF ALCOHOL AT PARTIES

The Law:

No person may give or supply liquor to a person under the age of 18 years or allow such a person in his or her care or under his or her supervision to consume liquor, except where it is given for the purpose of worship associated with the celebration of a religious observance.

(Please note that Bishops first and foremost encourage all parents and boys to obey this law. It is there to protect young people.)

The abuse of alcohol by adolescents is arguably one of the most serious social problems that the Bishop's community faces. Alcohol use and abuse has become part of the world our boys live in and while you may not allow your son to drink at home it is a reality that alcohol is available in the clubs our boys go to and the parties they attend. It is thus necessary for us as parents to take certain steps to protect our sons. These guidelines have been produced in an attempt to stimulate discussion on the topic of alcohol use by our boys and provide parents with some guidelines on how to handle this issue. As with all parenting choices, how you choose to handle this issue is a personal decision and these guidelines are not meant in anyway to be prescriptive.

Talk to your son about alcohol.

Dialogue at home on the topic of alcohol is essential. Discuss with your son:

- Your feelings and thoughts about the use of alcohol by teenagers.
- Your rules on the use of alcohol in your home
- What constitutes safe and sensible drinking
- Awareness of the perceived positives and negatives regarding alcohol use

Your son certainly needs clear boundaries with regard to your expectations. As a parent it is your job and your responsibility to provide these. Of course your son will test you but you need to stand firm on the boundaries you make with respect to issues like alcohol and drug use and attending dance clubs and raves.

But do be careful of adopting an authoritarian and disempowering approach. It is not about trying to make the decision about alcohol use and forcing it upon your son. Your son will also have 'feelings and thoughts' about the use of alcohol. It is important that parents listen to these in a non-judgmental manner. It should involve 'dialogue'. The decisions your son makes regarding the use of alcohol are far more important in the heat of the moment than the decisions you have made for them as a parent. As a parent your role is to try to facilitate this decision making process. Trying to make the decision for an adolescent is impossible, it will always be their decision, and alcohol will always be accessible. There needs to be clear balance between rules and facilitating decisions. Rules can be implemented in your house, but outside of this, and in the future, your child's drinking behaviour will be dependent on the decisions they have come to.

It has to be a continuous dialogue using 'teachable' moments. It will always be their decision, and a large part of your role as parent is to facilitate the decision making process of your child. It is also crucial here for parents to be honest and open about their own alcohol use, and the role it plays in their lives. Children watch their parents and parents have an important role to play in modeling responsible behaviour around alcohol use. Adolescents are picking up clear messages regarding their parents' use of alcohol, so it is better to get this out and talk about it.

Make it clear to your son that choosing not to drink is always an alternative and that there are good reasons not to drink. Good reasons not to drink include:

- Alcohol abuse is a leading cause of injuries among teenagers in South Africa. Research conducted by the MRC in Cape Town between 1999 and 2001 found that of patients younger than 20 years of age seen at trauma units, 32% had positive breath alcohol levels. Many of these injuries occur as a result of falls, assaults, and transport-related injuries (motor-vehicle and pedestrian injuries).
- Alcohol use leads to an increase in risk taking behaviour (including drug use and risky sexual activities). MRC research has identified strong links between adolescent drinking and engagement in risky sexual behaviour. The impaired judgment and increased impulsivity that are associated with alcohol use puts one at particular risk for doing silly and dangerous things.
- Regular abuse of alcohol can also 'arrest' adolescent emotional and psychological development.

Do not forget that facts don't change behaviour. An empowering strategy may involve something like discussing an alcohol adverts while watching TV together, how they make unrealistic associations with alcohol use (e.g. the secret to true happiness) and how advertising tries to manipulate their behaviour. These are the teachable moments parents must grasp.

Alcohol at Parties.

1. Our boys are putting their parents under increasing pressure to allow alcohol to be available at parties. On this issue, it worth noting the following:

Contrary to what your son may tell you, there are many members of our community who do not support the drinking of alcohol by their sons. There are also a significant number of parties where alcohol is not available. Research has shown that young people typically exaggerate the extent to which their peers are drinking. Having a skewed perception of what their peers are doing causes some to drink (more) and engage in other risk behaviours to do what they think the norm is.

2. When making the decision about serving alcohol at your sons' parties ask yourself the following questions: *What good reason is there to have alcohol at this*

party? *Why do we need to have alcohol? Is it a good enough reason to break a law.* Be clear in your mind about what you are trying to achieve by having alcohol available.

3. Discussions with pupils have indicated that problems at parties are associated with:
 - Open parties — where anyone is allowed to attend and there is no controlled access to the party.
 - A lack of parental supervision at the party.
 - Individuals attending the party are permitted to bring their own alcohol into the venue.
 - Alcohol being freely and openly available at the party.
 - Individuals who attend the party arranging for alcohol to be delivered to the party by an after hours "*mobile drop-off service*". These services, for a fee, will deliver alcohol and other substances to parties.
 - Research conducted by UCT and the MRC has shown that 9% of high school students in grade 8 have been a passenger in a car with an intoxicated driver. Parents should do what they can to reduce the likelihood of his happening. This should include having a discussion with their child about the dangers of being driven by someone who is over the legal alcohol limit for driving (0.05g alcohol/100 ml blood) and also having parents indicating their willingness to fetch their child from parties (either planned in advance, or in response to a phone call).

4. By contrast they indicate that the ingredients for a successful party are:
 - Strict control of access so that only people who have been invited are allowed to attend.
 - Security to keep out uninvited guests and to ensure that no alcohol is brought into the party. There are individuals who offer such a security services and who will provide "*bouncers*" for private parties to ensure that order is maintained.
 - Limited availability of alcohol – if any.
 - Parental supervision during the party.

5. Some parents are of the opinion that allowing boys to drink moderate amounts of alcohol is "*good for them*" and "*teaches them to drink responsibly*". This assumption needs to be challenged. It is not necessarily true that allowing your son to drink will discourage him from abusing alcohol —you may just be giving your son mixed messages about the use of alcohol.

In conclusion, the decision about whether to serve alcohol at adolescent parties should not be taken lightly. Teenage drinking is a problem and can have dangerous consequences. In those circumstances where you deem it appropriate to serve alcohol you would be well advised to take the necessary steps to limit the potential for alcohol abuse and where ever possible we should be encouraging our boys not to drink.



Please remember that to supply alcohol to an underage person is illegal and you could be open to prosecution and civil action, especially if something goes wrong as a result of providing alcohol to young people.

Initially prepared by
Jason R Bantjes 2005
Counsellor
Diocesan College

Updated in 2015