

Providing alcohol for underage youth: What messages should we be sending parents?

Adolescent alcohol use is a risky health behavior associated with alcohol poisoning, high-risk sexual behavior, accidental injury, and greater likelihood of developing an alcohol use disorder (AUD). Some parents believe that providing their children with alcohol and a safe place to drink (“parental provision”) can help teach their child responsible drinking behaviors that will prevent them from engaging in high-risk drinking behaviors. In this review, researchers examined 22 studies on the relationship between parental provision of alcohol and adolescent drinking. After reviewing the studies, researchers found five ways that parents can directly influence adolescent alcohol use.

- 1. Offering alcohol to their child:** When parents offer alcohol to their children, even in small sips, it is associated with earlier unsupervised drinking and episodes of heavy drinking.
- 2. Allowing underage drinking in the home:** Children have a higher likelihood of drinking during adolescence, heavy drinking, and frequency of alcohol-related problems.
- 3. Supplying alcohol:** Some studies show a lower likelihood of heavy drinking when parents give their children alcohol, but other studies show an increased risk for alcohol use. When parents supply alcohol, children are more likely to drink and to drink more often.
- 4. Drinking with the child:** Allowing children to drink at home increases alcohol use, both inside and outside the home, over time. When parents provide and drink alcohol with their child, they increase the child’s risk for more frequent and more risky alcohol use behaviors over time.
- 5. Hosting a party with alcohol (social hosting) or providing alcohol to the child and their friends (furnishing):** Besides the legal risks, both behaviors are linked to risky behavior among adolescents including: a higher likelihood of drinking, episodes of heavy drinking, facing alcohol-related problems, drinking and driving, and riding with someone who has been drinking.

Setting strict, consistent, zero-tolerance rules about alcohol use decreases the amount and frequency of drinking, as well as heavy drinking episodes. It is recommended that parents set zero-tolerance rules about drinking until the child reaches the legal drinking age.

Of major interest to:

- College Administrators
- Parents
- Educators
- Health Professionals
- Students
- Law and Policy Makers



Practice and Policy Suggestions:

This comprehensive literature review shows that parental provision of alcohol is associated with a greater likelihood of drinking and risky drinking behaviors during adolescence. Research shows that parents who try to teach their children to drink responsibly at home might end up reinforcing their child's drinking behavior. Underage drinking carries risks to adolescent health and safety, and can increase the risk for addiction, especially because brain development continues through the early 20s.

The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Kaynak, Ö., Winters, K.C., Cacciola, J., Kirby, K.C., Arria, A.M. (2014). Providing alcohol for underage youth: What messages should we be sending parents? *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. 75(4), 590-605. PMC4108600



About the College Life Study (CLS)

The CLS is a longitudinal study of 1,253 college students at a large, public, mid-Atlantic university. This study is one of the first large-scale scientific investigations that aims to discover the impact of health-related behaviors during the college experience. Any first-time, first-year student between 17 and 19 years old at the university in the fall of 2004 was eligible to participate in a screening survey. The researchers then selected students to participate in the longitudinal study, which consisted of two-hour personal interviews administered annually, beginning with their first year of college. A full description of the methods used is available.^{1,2} Inherent to all self-reporting research methods is the possibility for response bias. Because the sample is from one large university, the ability to generalize the findings elsewhere is uncertain. However, response rates have been excellent and attrition bias has been minimal.

For more information about the study, please visit www.cls.umd.edu or contact Amelia M. Arria at the University of Maryland School of Public Health at aarria@umd.edu.

¹ Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., O'Grady, K.E., Vincent, K.B., Fitzelle, D.B., Johnson, E.P., Wish, E.D. (2008). Drug exposure opportunities and use patterns among college students: Results of a longitudinal prospective cohort study. *Substance Abuse*. 29(4), 19-38. doi:10.1080/08897070802418451; PMC2614283

² Vincent, K.B., Kasperski, S.J., Caldeira, K.M., Garnier-Dykstra, L.M., Pinchevsky, G.M., O'Grady, K.E., Arria, A.M. (2012). Maintaining superior follow-up rates in a longitudinal study: Experiences from the College Life Study. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*. 6(1), 56-72. doi:10.5172/mra.2012.6.1.56; PMC3255097

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