

FROM THE DEAN OF BOYS' EDUCATION

ARTICLE BY PAUL DILLON ON ADOLESCENT ALCOHOL USE

Jason Cheers | Dean of Boys' Education

I wish to share some important information provided by Paul Dillon regarding adolescent alcohol use. For over ten years, the School has been very fortunate to have Paul speak to Year 12 during Pastoral Care week on a range of drug and risk-related issues. Many boys have commented on how valuable they have found these sessions to be. Paul has been working in the area of drug education for 25 years and has worked with many organisations, schools and media agencies across the country. In a recent publication, he provided for parents a very clear and succinct examination of the issues surrounding adolescent alcohol use at parties. I believe it to be an important resource to share with all parents, and it appears below.

WHAT IF YOUR SON WANTS TO TAKE ALCOHOL TO A PARTY?

This is a difficult issue for many parents of teenagers, with some in our community believing that alcohol consumption is simply a 'rite of passage' into adulthood and that 'everyone will go through that stage' at some time or other. Community attitudes are certainly changing with more and more parents expressing concern about young people drinking at an early age, particularly in a party environment. Evidence now shows that a liberal approach to underage drinking can potentially lead to a range of serious consequences including violence, sexual assault and even death. In most parts of the country (although SA, WA and the ACT still have to catch up) the law is also getting tougher on underage drinking as we learn more and more about the potential risks involved with adolescent drinking.

Your child is bound to tell you that you are 'the only parent who won't let them take alcohol' if you decide not to provide it, that 'you will shame them forever', and that they will be the laughing stock amongst their friends. Whatever your decision (and let's make it perfectly clear - it is your decision, no-one can tell you what to do with your child), you need to make sure you make it based on good quality information and not pressure from your child and their friends, and certainly not from other parents trying to make you feel bad about your efforts to keep your child as safe as possible.

Sadly, whether or not to provide alcohol to your child to take to a party or gathering is going to be a major issue for many families at some time or another through that difficult period called adolescence. We are bombarded with messages from every direction about the important role alcohol plays in socialising, whether it be through advertising and marketing, or simply by watching a sporting event on the television, it is not surprising that most young people believe you have to drink alcohol to have a good time.

If you are a parent who drinks and/or takes alcohol to parties/friends' places yourself (and if you don't, you certainly are in the minority) you may feel like it is almost impossible for you to say 'no' to your child, with many parents seeing themselves as hypocritical if they don't allow their adolescent to take a drink to a party. "How can I say 'no' when I drink myself?" is a question I get asked regularly. This I simply don't understand ... you're an adult, they're a child - of course it's okay for you to have different rules for them! The important thing is that you discuss why there are different rules for adults and young people - no-one blinks an eye when we say that young people can't drive. They do not have the necessary brain development to drive safely - it is an adult activity. The same applies to drinking alcohol!

There are no easy answers to this complex issue, but here are some simple tips for parents to consider:

- 1. Communicate:** Explain why you don't want them to take alcohol to parties. Tell them about the range of risks involved and your concerns about their physical, psychological and social health. They may not agree with your views on the matter, but they need to understand why you have created the rules that exist in your home.
- 2. Don't be afraid to say 'no':** Your child learns more from one word than almost any other - 'no'. Unfortunately too many parents fear that saying no to their child will make them unpopular and that their child won't like them - I've got news for you, you're a parent, they're not meant to like you! Remember, your child has lots of opportunities to make friends, they only have one set of parents.
- 3. Challenge ridiculous statements:** If your child tells you that you are the 'only Mum who won't provide alcohol' - make sure you do not let this statement go unchallenged. Most parents do not support providing alcohol to take to underage parties. If your teenager insists that this is the truth, let them provide some proof. Give them a piece of paper and a pen and ask them to supply names and phone numbers of five parents who do provide alcohol.
- 4. Talk to other parents:** Make sure other parents know your views on the subject of supplying alcohol to teenagers who are underage. If you do not believe that it is appropriate to provide your child with alcohol for a party, you will be most probably be pleasantly surprised as to how many parents agree with your stance. If parents have differing viewpoints that is their right, but let them know your reasons and make it clear that you do not want your child to drink at this stage in their life.

As teenagers mature, they certainly begin to regard themselves as young adults and want the freedoms (but often not the responsibilities) that go with adulthood. Supplying alcohol to underage drinkers for consumption outside the home is fraught with legal as well as personal dangers so, whatever your decision, make it carefully.



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If you would like further information, you can refer to Paul's website at <http://darta.net.au/> where you will find a range of resources and fact sheets. The School has also developed a resource for parents on our School's website titled "Guidelines for Teenage Parties", located in the bottom right hand corner of the Student Support page, which you can access by **clicking here**. Risk-taking is natural for boys and is a normal part of growing up. However dangerous risk taking behaviours associated with adolescent alcohol use can have serious negative consequences.

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> **Click here** view the **Safe Celebrations Some Guidelines for Teenage Parties** document.