

## Parenting

# How alcohol affects the developing brain.

**Your child's teenage years are a time of major growth and development inside their brain.**

While this period is great for creating fresh ideas, it also makes your child vulnerable to chemicals that affect the brain. When chemicals like alcohol metabolise, they become toxic to the body, including the brain.

Starting to drink alcohol as a teenager is riskier than you might think, because the brain is developing up until your child is in their mid-20s.

The developing brain is sensitive to the effects of even low doses of alcohol. This can impact on how their neural pathways develop.<sup>1,2</sup>



## Why alcohol and the teenage brain don't mix

Alcohol may contribute to long-term learning difficulties, memory problems and potentially brain damage. It contributes to the three major causes of teen death: land transport accidents, suicide and accidental poisoning.<sup>3</sup>

Early use of alcohol and other drugs by a young person can increase the chance of dependence and harm in the future.<sup>4</sup>

Because alcohol can increase risk-taking, it may lead to dangerous situations that wouldn't have happened if they'd been sober.

Young people are more vulnerable to alcohol-related harms because their bodies process alcohol and feel the effects differently. This means they can't control the amount they drink in the same way adults can.



## Parenting is a powerful influence on brain development

Positive parenting can help children to develop adopt healthy behaviours and is important to the development of brain function in young people.

Brain development is ongoing and it's never too late to provide your child with an environment that helps them reach their full potential.

There's a lot that a parent can do to help protect their child from the harms of alcohol, particularly during their developmental years. Arming yourself with quality, evidence-based information will help you to navigate these topics with your child.

1. National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol. Canberra: Australian Government; 2020.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. National Drug Strategy Household Survey detailed report 2016. Canberra AIHW; 2017.
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Deaths in Australia [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021 [cited 2021 Aug. 17]. Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/life-expectancy-death/deaths-in-australia> [accessed August 2021]
4. National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol. Canberra: Australian Government; 2020.



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