



Alcohol/drugs and raising kids

We know that households where there are drug and alcohol problems are unhealthy and unsafe for babies. However that doesn't mean that every healthy household abstains, there are levels of reasonable use. You may enjoy wine with dinner or champagne with your partner. You might go to a party and knowing your child is safely with a babysitter – kick up your heels. That's ok, it's about realising when you are over using it and keeping an eye on your health.

Is there a safe drinking level?

- » An acknowledged safe or reasonable level of drinking in Australia is: Men – no more than 4 standard drinks per day; Women – no more than 2 standard drinks per day – and everyone should have at least 2 alcohol free days each week.
- » The basic message is: Always drink alcohol in a responsible, safe way which shows you value your health and relationships above all else.
- » The research suggests that pregnant women should abstain from alcohol as there is inconclusive evidence as to the impact alcohol has on a developing foetus.
- » Minimal alcohol use is recommended for anyone who is breastfeeding, or in charge of a baby/child alone.

Minimising harm from alcohol:

For those parents who choose not to minimise their alcohol use, the following suggestions can reduce the harm for children:

- » Watch what you say – do not talk about alcohol in a way that glorifies it 'I can't wait to get stuck into the red at that party!', 'Oh it was so funny when she fell over after 5 glasses of champers' etc. – children are sponges and they pick up the values underlying these conversations. If a friend says something like this, reframe it in front of the children, e.g. 'I bet they were so embarrassed the next morning.'
- » Never be seen to use alcohol as a solution for stress or problems, e.g. 'God I am desperate for a beer after THAT conversation.'
- » Consider delaying your drinking until the kids are asleep. Sometimes – this will minimise your intake and be a better use of your time with your children.
- » Share the 'designated driver' role. This teaches kids that each of you can enjoy a night out without alcohol. Kids work things out pretty quickly and can detect messages about parental attitudes towards alcohol (e.g. 'Dad never drives cause he always likes to have lots of beers and be the life of the party when we're out').
- » Do not purchase alcohol as a gift for people associated with your children such as teachers or a sports coach.
- » If your friends come over, don't leave bottles and cans for kids to wake up to, collect these as the night goes on or do a quick clean up before bed so they do not wake up to that kind of scene.
- » Model safe driving by saying 'no thanks I have to drive later' when offered an alcoholic drink in front of your kids; they can then see that there are set boundaries.

Is there a safe way to take drugs?

- » People take drugs for many different reasons; drugs can refer to prescription drugs or illegal drugs.
- » Prescription drugs when taken as directed can be done so safely, some prescription drugs can really affect the way you behave. For example sleeping pills may make you pass out for a number of hours at a time or make you drowsier during the day.
- » Because of the effects of drug use, a parent's ability to care for children can be compromised when the parent is under the influence.
- » Unfortunately in today's society there is no safe way to take illegal drugs; the recommendation here is a zero tolerance to drugs when caring for children.

Everything in moderation. Just be aware that continual over use of alcohol and/or drugs could be to mask something deeper, it could be a way to avoid coping with current or past stress. If this is the case professional help is available, seek this now so that you minimise harm for your child(ren) and/or partner.