

HSE Press Release: Wednesday, 13 August 2018
Spokespersons available for interview on request

HSE urges parents to get informed ahead of Leaving Cert Results night on Wednesday

“Alcohol and drugs are more harmful if you do not know what is going on”

[Alcohol and Drugs: A Parent’s Guide](#)

With Leaving Certificate results coming out this Wednesday (15th August) and the inevitable celebrations that follow, the HSE’s [askaboutalcohol.ie](#) has launched a helpful guide for parents filled with information and practical advice on how to talk to teenagers about alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol and Drugs: A Parent’s Guide is available to download from [www.askaboutalcohol.ie/parents](#).

This guide has been written by experts specifically for parents, and the main message ahead of this week’s celebrations is to get the conversation started with your son or daughter. Students celebrating their exam results may feel under peer pressure to drink alcohol. It is important for parents to get informed and be realistic about alcohol risks and to set the boundaries.

From the age of 12 until our mid 20s our brains develop a lot. Using alcohol or drugs at this time can damage the growing brain, causing long-term emotional problems and difficulties with learning, planning and memory. The advice from the experts is to ensure that under 18s do not access alcohol at all and that over 18’s, if they do drink alcohol, are encouraged to drink in line with weekly low-risk drinking guidelines. Parents can feel powerless when they’re up against peer pressure and alcohol marketing, but parents matter. Research has shown that kids who have conversations with their parents and learn a lot about the dangers of alcohol and drug use are up to 50% less likely to use alcohol and drugs than those who don’t have such conversations.

Dr Gerry McCarney, Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, notes how important it is for parents to know what their children are facing: “Alcohol and drugs are more harmful if you do not know what is going on. Getting your child’s point of view is an important part of any conversation about alcohol or drugs. Listen carefully to find out what they know, what’s happening with their friends and how they feel about alcohol and drugs.”

The Parent’s Guide has advice from experts on:

- Getting the conversation about alcohol and drugs started with your teenager – picking the right moment and taking your opportunity to talk.
- Building resilience - showing your child that you have faith in their ability to get through difficult times and supporting them to solve their own problems and to be successful.
- Setting a good example – the way parents drink and their attitudes to alcohol are one of the biggest influences on their child’s attitude to alcohol. Be aware of the messages you are giving about alcohol and drugs (for example: “I need a glass of wine after the day I’ve had.”)

- How to really listen - spend more time trying to understand their world and their feelings before offering your opinions or advice.
- How to be the parent - handling resistance / setting boundaries / being brave. Keeping a close eye on your child and setting rules is the difficult choice, but you are doing the right thing.

The guide also has practical advice for parents on how to deal with specific situations, such as:

- Your child wants to go to an underage disco
- Your child's friends are allowed to drink
- Your teenager comes home drunk
- You think your child is taking drugs – how to recognise the signs
- Educating your child on alcohol content and risks
- Encouraging your teenager to be responsible for themselves and their friends

Rita O'Reilly from Parentline reassures parents that their input really makes a difference:

“Parents can feel helpless and resigned to the fact their child will drink, but this isn't true. Parents matter. This guide will empower you to take the control, make the rules and have the important conversations.”

Brian Wall from the Institute of Guidance Counsellors notes the importance of resilience for teenagers: “Upsets, disappointments, arguments and broken hearts are just a few of the challenges that young people face. Teenagers need to know their parents will look out for them no matter what. When young people rely on alcohol or drugs to get through social situations or cope with tough times, they miss the chance to identify and cope with painful emotions and to learn the skills of sharing their emotions and problems and asking for help. These skills can help them to manage better the next time and build their confidence and resilience.”

This practical guide will help parents to decide what's OK and what's not OK for their family, and how to set those boundaries for their children.

For more information visit: <http://www.askaboutalcohol.ie/parents/>