

## The Party Season

We are approaching party season again and this is a good time to consider party behaviours and managing our childrens' requests to attend end of year break up celebrations or 'gatherings'. This is a perennial issue and not just at the end of the year. Parents often ask us 'What do I say yes to and when do I stick to my guns and say no?' It is not a simple question to answer. No-one wants to be the fun police, but hopefully the following will provide a helpful guide.

If your children are at the age where this is becoming an issue for you, there are a number of good websites. Take the time to visit some of them. They contain good, solid advice that is more comprehensive than we can cover in our article. They include information about saying yes or no, hosting a party, staying safe, legal obligations, and our favourite: being a role model.

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/partying-safely-tips-for-teenagers>

[http://keepemsafe.com.au/?page\\_id=33](http://keepemsafe.com.au/?page_id=33)

<http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/teens/get-info/hot-topics/partying-safely.php>

<http://www.safeparty.com.au/party-safe-for-parents/>

<http://theothertalk.org.au/advice/safe-partying/>

<http://www.police.tas.gov.au/services-online/party-safe/>

Our regular mantra, 'model the behaviours you want to see in your children' is well applied to the consumption of alcohol (and other drugs) and the attitude towards them. Does alcohol have a priority place in your party planning? Do your children hear you say things like 'You can't have a celebration without champagne' or 'I need/love a drink to relax when I get home from work.' or 'We'd better make sure we've got plenty of grog for the week-end.' Are you teaching your children that they can't have a good time without alcohol, or that alcohol fixes a bad day?

As adults we know that there is such a thing as responsible drinking, but are the messages you give your children conveying this? When you are planning your own end of year celebrations make a point of letting your children know that catching up with friends and family, celebrating and having fun are what you are looking forward to most.

Don't let your children hear you planning how much you are going to drink, see you drunk, or hear you laughing about how much fun you had when you had been drinking, or how funny someone else was when they were drunk. Let them hear conversations about being sure there are plenty of non-alcoholic drink options for those who simply prefer not to drink alcohol, or who are driving cars.

There is no safe level of alcohol consumption for children or adolescents. If there are teenagers in your house, you don't need us to tell you about the changes that are going on with their body and their brain. You see it in their moods, their growth and their attitudes. The adolescent brain is in a state of total reorganisation, and alcohol

consumption can interfere with and impede this development. (To read further about this check out [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/preventing\\_alcohol\\_use](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/preventing_alcohol_use). and [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/brain\\_development\\_teenagers.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/brain_development_teenagers.html)).

Adolescence is a time for trying new things and it is unlikely that you will be able to stop your child from ever drinking alcohol. You can, however, influence them in this area by being a role model. It's really hard to tell your teenagers not to drink when you are reaching into the fridge for a beer or a Sauvignon Blanc every night when you get home. If this is your routine, we urge you to rethink it. Have some nights where there is no alcohol on the dinner table. Let your children see you enjoying other beverages. Let them see you having a fun time without alcohol. Provide alternatives to alcohol for celebratory drinks.

Some parents believe that by supplying some alcohol to their teenagers they are able to exercise some control over the amount they consume, but ultimately the message they are giving is 'it is OK to drink.' There is also research to suggest that the younger teenagers begin to drink the more serious their drinking will become. Ideally children should consume no alcohol before they turn 18. Your teenagers may appear to be challenging your system of values by being rebellious and trying out their own way of doing things, but we assure you they are still paying close attention to what you do. Generally they value and take on board your good opinion, advice and support even if it may not look like it, but it does need to be backed up by your own behaviours.

A young mother we know tells us how her one year old picks up the big broom and tries to sweep the floor, and wants to drink her cup of tea. 'Monkey see, monkey do' she laughs.

How very, very true.

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