

#NotoU18

PARENT BOOKLET

A Booklet providing practical
information, helpful tips and
guidance for parents and
caregivers of children

aged 10 to 18.



WELCOME

The *NO to Under 18* campaign is part of a national initiative to prevent underage drinking and support healthy development in young people. It is designed to support schools, homes and communities across South Africa.

This booklet has been developed by Aware.org (the Association for Alcohol Responsibility and Education), in partnership with Pick n Pay School Club. It provides practical information, helpful tips and guidance for parents and caregivers of children aged 10 to 18.

You play one of the most important roles in your child's life.

This guide will help you:

- Understand why underage drinking is harmful.
- Recognise early warning signs.
- Talk to your child about alcohol.
- Know what to do if there is a problem.
- Set healthy boundaries and build trust.

Remember: you do not have to be perfect to make a difference.

You just have to be present. We hope this guide supports you in protecting your child's future, helping them become a maker of tomorrow – and in growing stronger together.

TIP: YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE PERFECT – JUST PRESENT.

SADAG

Substance Abuse Helpline

0800 12 13 14 (24 hours)



WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW

Adolescence is not easy – for them or for you.

Teenagers change fast – in their bodies, their feelings and the way they relate to others.

They want independence but still need support and boundaries.

Some facts every parent should know:

- Alcohol affects a teenager's body and brain more than an adult's.
- Teenage drinking is often hidden – many parents are surprised when they find out.
- Friends, social media and curiosity are strong influences on choices.
- Most teens do not drink regularly – but when they do, they tend to binge.
- Parents' actions and attitudes make a real difference.

Even if your child is responsible and sensible, they are still vulnerable. This is not about lack of trust – it is about reducing risk and having open conversations.

Teens are navigating pressure from friends, media and their own growing need to belong. They may act confident but still feel unsure inside. Your steady presence, even during conflict or silence, gives them a sense of safety. You do not need to have all the answers – just being available and engaged has influence.

**TIP: EVEN RESPONSIBLE TEENS STILL NEED
SUPPORT AND LIMITS.**



WHY ALCOHOL HITS TEENAGERS DIFFERENTLY

Teenagers brains and bodies are still growing. Alcohol affects them more quickly and can cause more damage.

Here is what you need to know:

- The brain continues developing into the mid-20s – especially areas linked to judgment, decision-making and self-control.
- Alcohol can interfere with memory, learning and emotional regulation.
- Teenagers get drunk faster and stay drunk for longer than adults.
- One night of heavy drinking can reduce focus and performance for days.
- The earlier a teen starts drinking, the more likely they are to develop alcohol problems as adults.

Teenagers may seem grown-up, but their bodies are not ready for alcohol. They are at a stage where short-term decisions can have long-term effects.

It may seem like a minor choice – a single drink, one evening – but it can quietly disrupt growth and potential. Helping your teen avoid alcohol is not about control, it is about giving them the best possible chance to grow into the adult they are still becoming.

**TIP: YOUR TEEN'S BRAIN IS STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION
– PROTECT IT WHILE IT GROWS.**

**SADAG SMS Support
SMS 32312**

and a counsellor will call you back.



SPOT THE WARNING SIGNS

It is not always easy to know if your child has started drinking. Some teens are secretive – others show signs that can be mistaken for normal teenage behaviour.

Look out for warning signs:

- Sudden mood swings, anger or withdrawal.
- Unexplained tiredness or changes in sleep patterns.
- Loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy.
- Drop in school performance.
- New friends you do not know.
- Smell of alcohol on breath or clothing.
- Hidden bottles or missing alcohol from the home.

No single sign means your child is drinking – but patterns matter. If your gut says something is wrong, do not ignore it.

Changes in behaviour may have many causes, but alcohol is one of the possibilities that is easy to overlook. Pay attention without accusing. Stay observant, stay open, and let your child know you are noticing – not checking up, not accusing, just showing care.

TIP: TRUST YOUR GUT. PATTERNS MATTER MORE THAN ISOLATED BEHAVIOUR.



EMOTIONAL IMPACT AND FAMILY **FALLOUT**

Alcohol does not just affect your child's body – it also affects their emotions, relationships and ability to cope with stress.

Teenagers who drink are more likely to:

- Feel sad, anxious or depressed.
- Become more angry, jealous or withdrawn.
- Struggle with concentration and sleep.
- Act impulsively and pick fights.
- Distance themselves from family and friends.

Alcohol can lead to more arguments at home and make it harder to stay connected as a family. Some teens even drink in secret or steal money to buy alcohol, which can damage trust and communication.

Teenagers are still learning to manage emotions. Alcohol makes that much harder. When we are not able to talk about our feelings, we are more likely to act out, shut down or turn to substances to cope.

You can help by staying calm, being curious, rather than reactive, and offering safe ways for them to open up.

**TIP: STAY CALM AND CURIOUS
– NOT REACTIVE. THAT INVITES TRUST.**



RISKS THAT CAN **DERAIL** A FUTURE

Teenagers may drink to feel grown-up, fit in or escape problems. But even occasional drinking can lead to serious consequences.

These risks can include:

- Poor decisions that lead to accidents, injuries or violence.
- Unsafe sex, pregnancy or exposure to sexually transmitted infections.
- Conflicts with parents, teachers or the law.
- Increased chance of using other substances.
- Losing scholarships, sport opportunities or jobs.
- Long-term health damage.

Alcohol lowers inhibitions and judgment. It makes teenagers more likely to take risks they would normally avoid.

Your child does not need to be drinking every weekend for these risks to apply. Sometimes one bad decision changes everything.

Many teens feel untouchable – but alcohol can land them in situations they are not equipped to manage. A single moment of lowered judgment can have permanent consequences. Talking openly about risk does not scare them off – it helps them think ahead. Let them know you are on their side, helping them see the full picture.

TIP: HELP YOUR CHILD SEE THE RISKS CLEARLY – WITHOUT FEAR OR SHAME.



WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Even if you feel unsure, there are practical things you can do to guide your child and reduce the chances they will abuse alcohol.

Here are a few actions that make a difference:

- Model responsible behaviour – if you drink, do it responsibly and never drink and drive.
- Talk early and often – have open, ongoing conversations about alcohol and choices.
- Set rules and follow through – make your expectations clear and consistent.
- Get to know their friends – and the parents of their friends.
- Support their passions – activities, sport and creativity help protect against substance use.

Teenagers push limits – that is normal. What matters is that they know you care, you see them and you will show up when they need you. It is not always easy to stick to rules or keep talking when things are tense – but it helps tremendously.

Your child may act like they are not listening, but your words and actions still guide them. Boundaries create safety. Conversations build trust. Every small step you take – from checking in to showing up – helps shape how they respond to pressure, make decisions and value themselves.

Children often listen to other adults in their lives – sometimes even more than to their own parents. It helps when your child's friends' parents know your expectations too. Talk to them so that everyone is on the same page, especially when your child is in their care.

TIP: SMALL ACTIONS MATTER.

WHAT YOU DO – AND HOW YOU DO IT

– STAYS WITH THEM.

SADAG
Suicide Crisis Line
0800 567 567



WHEN TO WORRY – AND WHERE TO **GET HELP**

If you are worried about your child's alcohol use, you are not alone. If you are worried, trust that feeling and reach out sooner rather than later.

You might need help if your child:

- Drinks regularly or in secret.
- Lies about where they have been or who they are with.
- Has mood swings, low energy or avoids you completely.
- Starts skipping school or getting into trouble.

Addiction can develop faster in teens than adults because their brains are still forming habits. If your child seems unable to stop, hides alcohol or drinks to cope with emotions, they may need more than a warning – they may need real support. Recovery is possible, especially when it starts early and without shame.

Where to go for help:

- Talk to a counsellor at school or in your community.
- Call the SADAG 24-hour Substance Abuse Helpline: **0800 12 13 14** or WhatsApp their Chatline on **087 163 2025**.
- SMS **32312** and a counsellor will call you back.
- Visit the Aware.org or SADAG's website for support resources.

Remember, asking for help is not weakness – it is strength. There are people who understand and want to help you, and your child move forward.

TIP: ASKING FOR HELP IS STRENGTH, NOT FAILURE.



LEGAL **FACTS** AND FASD

In South Africa, the legal drinking age is 18. This means:

- It is illegal to sell alcohol to anyone under 18.
- It is illegal for anyone under 18 to buy or consume alcohol.
- It is illegal for an adult to give alcohol to a minor.

Teenagers who drink underage may also face school disciplinary action or damage their criminal record.

Another serious issue is FASD – Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. This happens when a woman drinks alcohol while pregnant, and can result in lifelong challenges with learning, behaviour and health for the child.

FASD can cause permanent physical and mental damage, including:

- Learning disabilities.
- Behaviour problems.
- Memory and attention issues.
- Facial abnormalities.
- Organ damage.

There is no safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy. If you are pregnant or planning to fall pregnant, the safest choice is to stop drinking entirely.

If you are worried that someone is drinking while pregnant, or need help yourself, contact a health professional or support group.

TIP: KNOWING THE LAW HELPS YOU PROTECT YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE.

SADAG

011 234 4837

Website: www.sadag.org



COMMON **MYTHS** ABOUT ALCOHOL

There are many myths about alcohol that teenagers believe. These ideas are not simply wrong – they can also put your child at risk.

MYTH: Everyone drinks.

FACT: One third of teens do not drink at all.
Most drink less than you think.

MYTH: Alcohol makes me more confident.

FACT: It may feel that way at first, but it also makes people say or do things they regret.

MYTH: A little alcohol does not hurt.

FACT: Even small amounts can affect a developing brain. Binge drinking once can lower performance.

MYTH: Adults drink, so why can't we?

FACT: Adults have fully developed brains and legal rights. Teenagers do not.

Talk to your child about these myths. Help them separate peer pressure from the truth.

**TIP: CHALLENGE MYTHS WITH FACTS
– AND LEAVE SPACE FOR QUESTIONS.**



HOW TO **HANDLE** PEER PRESSURE

Peer pressure is one of the biggest reasons teenagers try alcohol. They want to fit in, avoid embarrassment or look brave.

You can help your child build the confidence to say no.

Here are some ideas to share:

- Practise responses like, “No thanks, I’m good,” or “I do not drink, it is not my thing.”
- Suggest they bring their own non-alcoholic drinks to a party.
- Encourage them to hang out with people who do not pressure them.
- Teach them to text you a code word if they need an excuse to leave.

Remind your child that real friends respect your choices. It is not weakness to say no – it is strength.

Saying no takes practice, especially when everyone else seems to be saying yes. Help your teen prepare for these moments before they happen. Let them know they can always use you as an excuse, and that stepping away from pressure is not being weak – it is about knowing who you are and showing self-respect.

TIP: HELP YOUR TEEN PRACTISE **SAYING NO
– BEFORE THEY NEED TO.**



WHAT TO SAY (AND WHAT **NOT** TO SAY)

**Talking about alcohol can feel awkward.
But how you speak matters.**

Here are things to try:

- Ask, “What have you heard about drinking?” – let them speak first.
- Share facts and let them ask questions.
- Be honest about why you care and what worries you.
- Set clear rules without lecturing or threatening.

Avoid saying:

- “If you ever drink, you are grounded for life!”
- “You are just like your uncle who ruined his life!”
- “Drinking is the worst thing you could ever do!”

Teenagers shut down when they feel judged or shamed. Keep the door open. Calm, respectful conversations go a long way.

Your child may test boundaries or say things that upset you – but how you respond can keep trust alive. Stay curious, not critical. Even if the conversation does not go as planned, the fact that you are talking at all makes a lasting impact. Connection, not control, is what keeps the dialogue going.

TIP: LISTEN FIRST. SPEAK CALMLY. KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING.



YOU ARE **NOT** ALONE

Parenting a teenager can feel lonely, especially if you are dealing with difficult behaviour, secrecy or worry. Many other parents are facing the same struggles.

You are not weak, and you are not failing.

Get support from:

- Friends and family whom you trust.
- Other parents – try school WhatsApp groups or support circles.
- Your child's teacher or school counsellor.
- Online communities or helplines such as SADAG.
- SANCA and other organisations that support families dealing with alcohol problems.

You do not have to do this by yourself. Support is not a luxury – it is essential. Even just talking to one other parent can ease the pressure.

When you feel isolated, it is easy to think no one else is going through what you are. But you are not alone – many parents are facing the same fears, doubts and frustrations. Reaching out is not a sign that you are failing – it is a step towards getting perspective, feeling heard and finding solutions that work.

Remember, it takes strength to ask for help – and courage to keep showing up.

TIP: YOU ARE NOT FAILING
– **REACHING OUT IS HOW WE FIND**
OUR STRENGTH.

SANCA
South African National Council on
Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
Website: www.sancanational.info



KEEP

SHOWING UP – IT MATTERS

Raising a teenager is not easy. There are no perfect parents and no perfect children. What matters is staying connected and showing your child that you care.

Even if your child has already tried alcohol, it is not too late.

You can still:

- Help them understand the risks.
- Encourage open conversations.
- Get professional support if needed.
- Remind them of their strengths and potential.

Teenagers who know they are not alone are more likely to make healthy choices.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. By doing so, you are helping to build a safer, healthier future – not only for your child, but for your family and your community.

TIP: EVEN IF YOUR CHILD HAS SLIPPED, YOU CAN STILL SHOW UP AND SUPPORT CHANGE.



THANK
YOU