

Information your teenagers need about drink driving



# Okay

they don't talk to **strangers**,  
they **look** before they cross the road  
and they know about **safe** sex.

Now your teenagers  
need to know  
about **drink driving**.



## Introduction

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As parents, we like to feel that we can let our teenagers go out at night and know we have done our best to help them remain safe as either new drivers or as passengers in their friends' cars.

In spite of major improvements in Australia's road toll in recent years, road crashes, sadly, remain the leading cause of death among young people.

Around 9,000 young people aged between 15 and 24 are killed or seriously injured in road crashes each year. Alcohol is a factor in around a third of these deaths and is certainly also a factor in crashes causing serious injuries.

Teenagers learning to drive are generally at the age when they try alcohol for the first

time. Although your teenager may be a good driver, alcohol will affect their ability to drive safely.

This brochure aims to give you helpful ideas on how to talk to your teenager about the responsibilities that go with being a driver, and particularly about drinking and driving.

Make sure they understand that their first priority should always be the safety of themselves and their passengers.

### *Legal blood alcohol limits for young drivers*

*You should know, and remind your teenager, that learner drivers and provisional licence holders are subject to a zero blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit. This means that drinking any alcohol at all will put them over the legal limit to drive.*

## Getting Started

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Often the hardest part of discussing drink driving with teenagers is getting the discussion started. Perhaps a television news item or a newspaper article could provide a suitable lead-in; or when you're having a wine with dinner or relaxing at a family barbecue.

Leaving it until your teenager is heading out the door with keys in hand is not the best time to get their attention.





You probably know your teenager better than anyone and will know instinctively when it is time to start talking about drink driving. You will know the time is right when your teenager:

- starts going to places where alcohol is probably available
- has started drinking alcohol
- goes out in friends' cars
- wants to learn to drive
- has reached the age where they can apply for a learner's permit
- wants to borrow the car
- can't wait to get their licence.

Certainly, once any of these occurs it is time for you both to agree on some guidelines about driving or going out in friends' cars.

*A special note: it is most important that you speak with your teenager in an adult-to-adult way. No-one likes to feel they're being talked down to or told what to do without the opportunity to have their say. A genuine discussion in which you and your teenager participate equally, both of you expressing views which are listened to and built on, is both non-threatening and productive. It is also more likely to result in a set of agreed rules or guidelines which will be acceptable to you both, remembered and followed.*

Here are some hints and suggestions you might find helpful when talking to your teenager about drink driving.

## Setting Acceptable Guidelines

By amicably agreeing to a set of reasonable guidelines you are demonstrating a level of confidence in your teenager and acknowledging a level of maturity which goes with the responsibility of their borrowing your car or having a car of their own. You should not set guidelines that you would not be prepared to follow yourself.

*Perhaps the most important guideline you can set with your teenager is to agree that, no matter what the time or the situation, they can always call you to get a lift or to have money waiting at home if they get a taxi. You should also agree that there will be no arguments or discussions about their reasons for wanting your help until the next day when you can both discuss what happened quietly and calmly.*

Other things you can do include:

- Ask your teenager to think about alternative ways to get home safely from a party or outing before they leave. This helps them to think ahead and perhaps make plans to stay over.
- Discuss what action they can take if they find themselves in a situation where they have been drinking or their friend, in whose care they plan to travel, has been drinking and shouldn't be driving. Be sure to let your teenager know that the



following options are acceptable to you:

- calling for a lift home
  - getting a taxi
  - sleeping over
  - getting a lift home with someone who has not been drinking.
- Suggest that your teenager talks with their friends about setting up an informal designated-driver program whereby each member takes a turn to be the driver for a night and agrees not to drink any alcohol. This will require considerable commitment and will-power from the person nominated, who will also need support from the rest of the group.

## Alcohol

Alcohol greatly affects a person's ability to drive a car safely. Young people are often affected more quickly and by smaller amounts of alcohol. Taking drugs or medication, when combined with alcohol, puts them at even higher risk of being involved in a road crash. Drugs can affect their ability to make sound decisions or to act quickly in an emergency. When combined with alcohol, the effects can be deadly.

Alcohol will:

- reduce their ability to do more than one thing at a time, such as drive and talk
- make it hard to concentrate on driving
- slow reaction time if something unexpected happens

- encourage over-confidence and remove inhibitions which could lead to risk taking
- distort hearing and vision, especially at night
- make simple tasks more difficult
- make drivers more likely to fall asleep at the wheel.

Explain to your teenager that:

- drinking coffee, exercising, having a shower or vomiting do not remove alcohol from the body
- nothing gets rid of alcohol except the passing of time. Alcohol is removed from the body at about one standard drink (or 10 grams of alcohol) an hour. This means that after a few drinks, it will be some hours before the alcohol has left the body and it is safe to drive.





## Peer Group Pressure

Peer group pressure is very strong among teenagers. The need to be part of a group and accepted by their peers often means that teenagers will go along with things they don't necessarily agree with rather than stand out from the group.

Many social situations make it more likely that young people will drink before driving or accept a lift from a person who has been drinking. For example, in a car full of young people it is hard for young drivers to resist the temptation to show off to their friends. At these times it is also common for them not to wear seatbelts.

However, it is important that your teenager understands that they are solely responsible for their own actions. It can be easy to say "they made me do it" (drive too fast, drive after drinking, etc). In such cases it might be useful to ask your teenager "Why do you give other people so much power (or control)

over your life?" and "Who would the police charge if there was a crash?"

Going against the wishes of the group is very difficult at first, but can become easier with practice. By discussing these situations with your teenager you can help them prepare for the time when they will need the confidence to say "no".

### Some strategies for your teenager

When they are confronted with a potential drink-driving situation, suggest that they:

- give a simple explanation about why they refuse to go with the crowd and be honest about what they think and feel
- be polite, but firm, when saying "no"
- show that they are in control of their own actions and decisions and are committed to their decision
- suggest some of the possible consequences of going through with whatever the planned action is. By taking charge of their own actions or acting responsibly they can avoid being seen as afraid and being rejected by the group
- be prepared to say that they don't like to be pressured into doing things they know are not right.





## Consequences

Teenagers don't always think about the long-term consequences of their actions. Talk to them about some of the outcomes of unsafe driving including drink driving and how this could affect their lives forever.

### personal consequences

- being responsible for killing or seriously injuring someone; either themselves or someone else including a friend or family member
- losing people's respect
- loss of use of the family car

### legal consequences

- losing their licence
- heavy fines or imprisonment
- having a criminal record which could affect employment prospects, or even getting a passport

### financial consequences

- no insurance cover in the event of a crash if the driver was over their legal BAC limit to drive
- higher insurance premiums when they're allowed to hold a licence again
- cost of taxis and buses

### social consequences

- losing their job or having difficulty getting a job (because of a criminal record and/or needing a licence for work)
- losing their independence
- having to rely on public transport, friends or family for rides

## Summary

The single most important thing you can do is keep a two-way communication channel open with your teenager so you can feel confident that they will come to you if they need your help. They will then feel equally confident that you will help them out (without fear of reprisal or condemnation) if they find themselves in a difficult situation.

**Talking is the key.**



## Australian Government

### Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

*If you would like more information about drink driving or other road safety issues, please call the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government on 1800 621 372 or visit our website:*

**[www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/safety/](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/safety/)**