

Parents are the biggest influence on children's attitude towards alcohol, study finds

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A report released today by the Universities of Leeds and Manchester shows that parents are the most important influence on young children's - aged 5 to 12 - attitudes towards alcohol.

Parents, it finds, are largely successful in educating children about the social pleasures and risks of drinking at home.

However, it also suggests, children are less aware of the other issues surrounding [alcohol](#) consumption including potential health risks.

The findings have important implications for bodies that currently provide guidance to [parents](#) on how to talk to their children about alcohol. The researchers also suggest that alcohol education in schools could be improved to complement the support that children receive at home.

Lead author of the report Professor Gill Valentine, from the University of Leeds, said: "Our research shows how important it is to open up a frank and honest dialogue about alcohol with children from an early age.

"On the whole parents are already doing a good job at teaching their kids about sensible drinking. They avoid being drunk in front of their children and try to limit their exposure to alcohol outside the home, for example in pubs where food is not being served.

“However, parents don’t talk as much about the health risks – such as cancer, liver cirrhosis and heart disease – because these issues do not resonate with their own experiences of drinking alcohol.”

Professor Valentine and colleagues, including Dr. Mark Jayne from The University of Manchester, conducted a national survey of 2,089 parents and carers, and in-depth case studies to find out how parents teach [young children](#) about alcohol.

They examined influences from both within the family – house rules and the drinking habits of individual family members – and from external sources such as the media, social networks and law.

They found that parents want their children to appreciate the pleasures and benefits of alcohol, as well as the risks of excessive consumption so that as adults they will drink sensibly.

The case studies showed that this message had been successfully absorbed by the children interviewed, who imagined that as adults they would only drink in moderation. They also recognised that alcohol is an adult product and were aware of age restrictions on buying alcohol through point of sale campaigns in supermarkets.

However, while the children had a reasonable awareness of the social harms associated with drinking, they had a poorer grasp of potential health risks. The majority could also not recall being taught about alcohol at school, even though the Department for Education states that alcohol education should form part of the National Curriculum.

“The fact that children say they are not learning about alcohol at school suggests that this education is either not taking place, or is not being delivered effectively,” said Professor Valentine. “This implies that it would be beneficial for the Department for Education to review the way

alcohol education is currently delivered as part of the National Curriculum in primary schools. This education should also be run in parallel with campaigns targeted at parents in order to maximise impact.”

More information: The findings will be presented by Professor Valentine today at the Alcohol Concern Annual Conference and AGM.

Provided by University of Manchester

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