

Should adolescents be allowed to drink at home? Depends on the home, study finds

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Does allowing adolescents to drink at home increase or decrease their chances for future alcohol-related problems? It depends on the type of home, a new study finds.

Research by Ash Levitt, senior research scientist at the University at Buffalo Research Institute on Addictions (RIA), found that [family](#) structure plays a significant role in whether or not adolescents who drink at home go on to negative involvement with [alcohol](#) as young adults.

"Some parents believe allowing their children to drink at home, in a supervised and controlled environment, helps them learn to drink responsibly," Levitt says. "On the other hand, many believe allowing adolescents to drink at home sends the wrong message, by condoning an illegal behavior that can have potential, significant health risks.

"What we found is that neither of those perspectives is 100 percent true, and outcomes greatly depend on whether the teenagers live in an intact family," Levitt says.

An "intact" family is defined as children living with both biological parents. "Non-intact" families included blended (i.e., one biological parent and one step-parent) or single-parent family environments.

Levitt's research found that adolescents from intact families who were allowed to drink at home showed the lowest levels of alcohol use and problems over time, whereas those from non-intact families who were allowed to drink at home showed the highest levels of involvement. The results controlled for factors such as a family history of alcohol problems, parenting practices and demographic characteristics.

"The current study has several important implications for prevention and intervention of adolescent alcohol involvement," Levitt says. "Family-based treatment of adolescent substance use is considered to be more successful than treatment efforts not involving the family. Treatment can be tailored if adolescents are identified as living in potentially risky environments. Efforts also could be made to educate parents about potentially risky outcomes associated with allowing their children to drink at home according to their specific family environment."

Up to 30 percent of parents report allowing their children to drink at [home](#) under at least some circumstances, according to the American Medical Association.

The study appears in the September issue of *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. It was co-authored by M. Lynne Cooper, PhD, from the University of Missouri and was funded by grants from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

More information: "Should Parents Allow Their Adolescent Children to Drink at Home? Family Factors as Predictors of Alcohol Involvement Trajectories Over 15 Years." *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. Sep 2015, Vol. 76, No. 5, pp. 661-670 DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2015.76.661](https://doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2015.76.661)

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