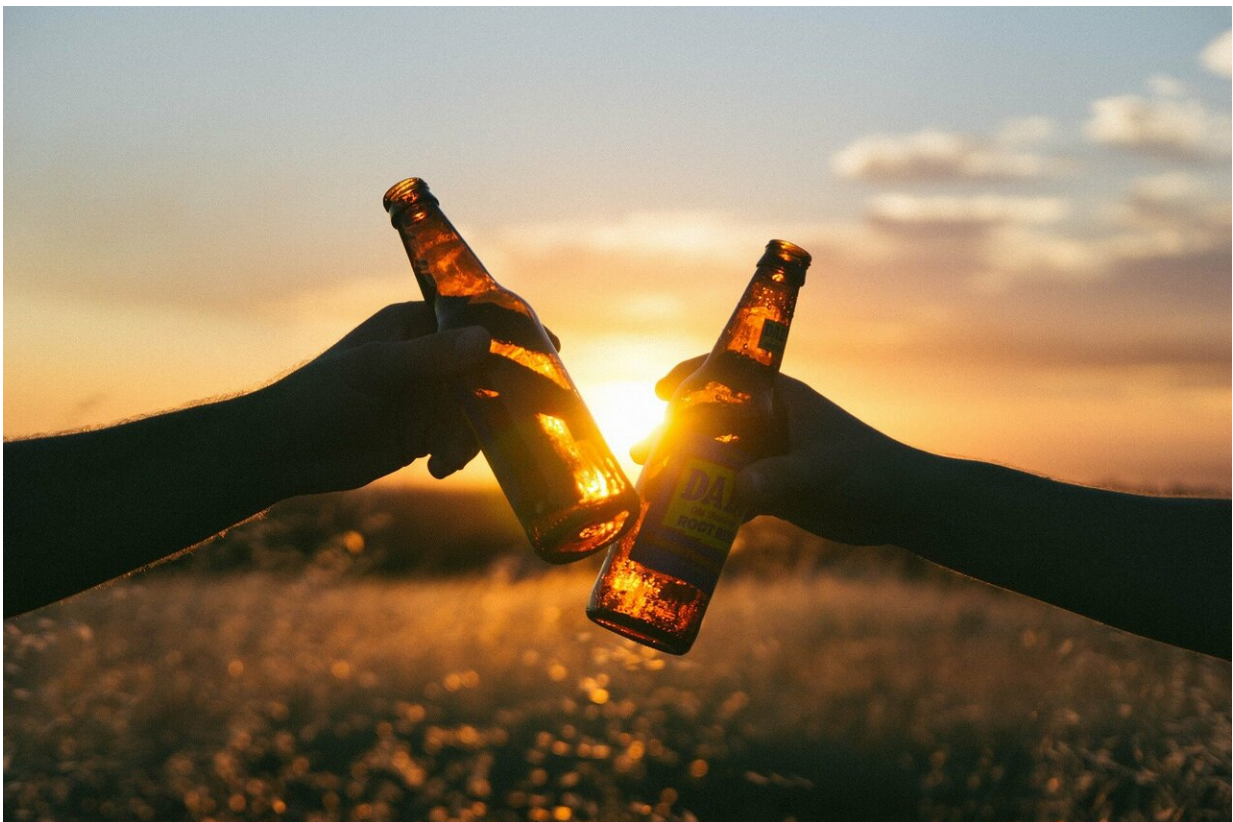


Research suggests parenting styles affect whether a child uses drinking to cope with stress

June 24 2024, by Erin Kayata



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Every parent wants their kid to have a healthy relationship with alcohol. But how do you help them get there? Is it by letting them drink while

they're young in hopes of making alcohol less alluring? Or by taking a strict no-drinking approach when they're underage?

The answer is neither, according to research from Robert Leeman, professor and chair of the health sciences department at Northeastern University, who worked with a team looking into the indirect influence of parenting styles on a person's tendency toward heavy episodic [drinking](#) to alleviate stress.

The research found that, specifically, maternal permissiveness was indirectly linked to more [alcohol problems](#) and episodes of heavy [drinking to deal with stress](#), while authoritative styles that set boundaries were indirectly linked to fewer alcohol-related issues and stress-induced drinking episodes.

The study is [published](#) in the journal *Behavioral Sciences*.

"We've found both passive parenting styles and authoritarian parenting styles can have negative outcomes in terms of the children's substance use risk for different reasons," Leeman said. "There's anecdotal evidence that if we demystify alcohol for our kids, then they'll be less likely to be at risk later on. That's not what the data say."

Leeman said there's other elements at play here, including [family history](#) and how alcohol impacts the person. But study data show overall that children allowed to drink underage are at more of a risk of alcohol problems and heavy drinking episodes.

Meanwhile, the less early exposure children have, the lower their risk is for these issues.

"If somebody is going to begin drinking at some point in their life, the later that they do it, the better," Leeman said. "This 'let the kids and their

friends drink in my house' flies in the face of that."

The work corroborates with Leeman's past research, [which focuses on addictive behaviors and difficulties with self-control](#), mostly when it comes to alcohol and [young adults](#).

Leeman said a more strict, authoritarian style can also be ineffective in curbing drinking among kids, because as they age, they don't necessarily understand why they need to be cautious around drinking. This puts them at risk of acting out when they're on their own and able to make their own decisions around alcohol, because they might not necessarily understand the dangers of drinking.

"It's parenting out of fear and the children don't internalize why," Leeman said. "I know parents can sometimes get frustrated with one 'why?' question after another from children. It might seem defiant, but that's typically not the case. They're just trying to understand."

What is the best approach parents can take when it comes to teen drinking? Leeman said the research found that an authoritative approach was indirectly linked with better outcomes. Parents using this style don't operate from a place of fear, but explain to children why they set the boundaries they do.

"The reason why people use these substances is they feel really good in your brain," Leeman said. "I think we need to be honest about that, tempered with (a reason) why you need to not use them or use them moderately when you're of age."

The goal of this, Leeman said, is to empower [children](#) to make their own decisions while also being willing to say no, especially when it comes to letting them go to places where there will be drinking or drugs.

"I know it's easy to feel beaten down as a parent, that you don't have a big impact on your child's life," Leeman said. "That's just not the case. (Kids) really are listening and there's good evidence that parenting continues to have an impact, not just negatively, but positively into a young person's 20s."

More information: Felix B. Muniz et al, A Test of the Self-Medication Hypothesis Using a Latent Measurement Model: Are Stress and Impaired Control over Alcohol Mediating Mechanisms of Parenting Styles on Heavy Episodic Drinking and Alcohol-Related Problems among University Students?, *Behavioral Sciences* (2024). [DOI: 10.3390/bs14050384](https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14050384)

This story is republished courtesy of Northeastern Global News
news.northeastern.edu.

Provided by Northeastern University

Citation: Research suggests parenting styles affect whether a child uses drinking to cope with stress (2024, June 24) retrieved 28 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-06-parenting-styles-affect-child-cope.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.