

Parents who drink too much

For parents, and family members seeking support



Living with a parent or carer who drinks harmfully is very difficult for a child. It can have a serious impact on their daily life, self-esteem, and long-term mental health and wellbeing. But with the right support, family life can improve.

How might a parent's drinking impact on their children?

Children tend to become aware from an early age of parental drinking. While some parents attempt to conceal their alcohol use from their children, children are often more aware of their drinking earlier than their parents realise, despite perhaps not fully understanding it.

Compared to other children, children of parents who are alcohol dependent are:

- Twice as likely to experience difficulties at school
- Three times more likely to consider suicide
- Four times more likely to become dependent drinkers themselves
- Five times more likely to develop eating disorders

Reducing the harm

Children of parents who drink too much appear to be least at risk if they are from families with high levels of family support; where there is a non-drinking parent who can reduce the negative impact of the drinking parent; and where there is security, for example a regular household income.

There is evidence that resilience is important in helping children to cope with a parent drinking too much. Resilience refers to a child's ability to adapt to stress and adversity. You can help a child to develop resilience in a number of ways, for example through encouraging them to take part in activities outside the family home.



How do you know if someone has a problem with alcohol?

If you are worried about your drinking or that of someone you know, you should talk to someone about it. The first place to start might be your GP, or the organisations listed below. Someone might need help if:

- They are unable to control the amount they drink
- Their behaviour changes because of their drinking
- Their drinking is causing problems in everyday life

If you are a parent who drinks too much:

- **Be honest.** Talk openly to your children about your drinking. Children can often spot that there is something wrong, even if you deny it
- **Avoid pressuring your children** into taking sides in family disagreements, and avoid placing an older child in the role of a peer or substitute parent
- **Help your children to thrive.** Try to encourage your children to take part in activities outside the home, like sports clubs and youth groups, which will help build their independence and resilience
- **Seek support.** Remember that the best thing for both you and your children is to take action about your drinking. Confidential support is available for you (see below)

If you are a child living with a parent or carer who drinks too much:

- **Seek support.** If you think that your parent, carer or anyone else who is supposed to be looking after you is drinking too much, confidential support is available for you (see below)
- Remember that **you cannot control your parent's drinking.** You are not the reason they drink, and it is up to your parent to take charge of their own drinking
- **Read more** in our factsheet, 'I think my parent drinks too much'

If you are a family member seeking support:

- **Realise that you are not alone.** Thousands of people across the UK are affected by the drinking of a family member
- **Seek support.** Get in contact with one of the support groups listed below: they will understand your needs and help provide the support you deserve
- If you can, help **support the parent's children** and/or signpost them to organisations that can do so
- **Recognise that change is possible.** You cannot control (and are not responsible for) the drinking of family members, but you can start a process of change

This advice has been adapted from information provided by the National Association for Children of Alcoholics.



What about my children's drinking?

- Try to ensure that your children maintain an **alcohol-free childhood**, at the very least up to the age of 15
- Discuss with your children the pleasures and dangers associated with drinking, and **be honest** about your own drinking – children can spot hypocrisy a mile off
- Set **consistent rules** around drinking. Talking to the parents of your children's friends and agreeing boundaries together might help
- Be aware of **your own drinking behaviour**
- If you keep alcohol in the home, be aware of how accessible it is to your children

Further support

- If you think you and/or your children may be drinking too much, contact **Drinkline** (England) on **0300 123 1110** or **Dan24/7** (Wales) on **0808 808 2234**
- The **National Association for Children of Alcoholics** have lots of information for children (and their parents) on their website. Visit nacoa.org.uk or call **0800 358 3456**
- **Al-Anon** family groups provide support to anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking, regardless of whether that person is still drinking or not. Visit al-anonuk.org.uk
- You can find more support services through **Adfam**. Visit adfam.org.uk
- To read our other factsheets about alcohol and families visit alcoholconcern.org.uk/alcohol-awareness-week