Supporting a young person in their decision not to use alcohol or other drugs

Presentation to Generation Next 2017

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None of them drink alcohol – some due to religious reasons, others due to prior problems with the drug and others... just because....

As you can see – just because you don’t drink, it doesn’t mean you’re going to be a better person...

Other famous teetotalers through history

Increasingly seeing people talk about their ‘non-drinking’

Outline of presentation

- Australian culture and alcohol – ‘it’s tough to be a non-drinker’
- how many young Australians choose not to drink alcohol? How many choose not to use other drugs? Are things changing? If so, why?
- why do some young people choose not to drink alcohol?
- what are the challenges they face?
- what should parents do to support their children in this area?
- how can those who work with young people support those who choose not to drink?
Do we really have a chance?

In a culture where alcohol is not just socially accepted but increasingly 'socially expected' – how do non-drinkers feel?

How many Australians choose not to drink alcohol or other drugs?

More than one in five (14 years and over) choose to abstain from alcohol

- increasing from 18.5% in 1991 to 21.8% in 2013
- those who had never had a full serve of alcohol rose from 6.5% to 13.8%
- number of ex-drinkers dropped from 12% to 8%

Most Australians (14 years and over) report never using illicit drugs

- 2016 NDSHS – under 30s were smoking less, drinking less and using fewer illicit drugs in 2016 than in 2001
- those in their 40s, 50s and 60s, there was little to no change, however, use of some drugs has increased between 2013 and 2016
New data came out last week – received very little, if any, media coverage ... it was positive!!!

2016 National Drug Strategy Household Survey

Never used illicit drugs (%) - 14 years and over

Changes in 'recent use' (%): 1991-2016

Alcohol - non-drinking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, 1991-2016

How many school-based young people drink and/or use other drugs?

Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014

How many young Australians choose not to drink alcohol or illicit drugs?

Growing numbers of school-based young people are choosing not to drink

- proportion of 12-17 year-olds who reported never consuming alcohol has risen from 11% in 1999 to 32% in 2014
- number of 'non-drinkers' increased across all ages between 2011 and 2014 - amongst 15-year-olds, 70% reported being a 'non-drinker' in 2014, 59% in the previous survey
- number of 12-15 year-olds drinking has been decreasing since hitting a peak in 2002 and in 2014 was at its lowest point since the survey began

Use of illicit drugs, other than cannabis, continues to be uncommon, with 'recent use' rates much lower than in the 90s

White & Williams (2016) Australian secondary school students’ use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2014
Students who describe themselves as a 'non-drinker', Australian secondary school students (%), 2011-2014

Never consumed alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), 2011-2014

Never used alcohol, Australian secondary school students (%), 1999-2014

Prevalence (%) of last year drug use among 12-17 year old students, 1996-2014

"When it comes to underage drinking, most youth deserve an A+"

"Straight edge" – 'sXe' or 'Xi'

A youth sub-culture promoting a 'clean living' lifestyle – no sex, no alcohol or other drugs
Why do young people choose not to drink alcohol?

There are several reasons why young people choose not to drink alcohol. These reasons can be categorized into traditional and modern factors. Let's explore some of these reasons in detail:

**Traditional Factors**

1. **Parental Influence**
   - Parents who model non-drinking behaviors are more likely to influence their children to not drink.

2. **Religious or Cultural Reasons**
   - Young people may choose not to drink due to religious or cultural beliefs that discourage alcohol consumption.

3. **Financial Pressures**
   - The cost of alcohol can be a significant deterrent for young people, especially those on a tight budget.

4. **Social Norms**
   - Drinking is often seen as ‘socially acceptable’ or ‘expected’ behavior, but for young non-drinkers, it may not fit within their identity.

5. **Achieving Other Goals**
   - Young people may choose not to drink to achieve other goals, such as getting good grades or maintaining physical health.

**Modern Factors**

1. **Attitudes of Parents**
   - Parents’ attitudes have shifted in recent years, and there is a growing recognition of the harm caused by alcohol.

2. **Real Life Observations**
   - Real life observations and personal experiences can influence young people’s decisions not to drink.

3. **Lack of Access**
   - The availability of alcohol in social settings can impact young people’s decisions not to drink.

4. **Concern About Online Image**
   - Young people may be concerned about how their online presence reflects on them, especially in the context of their social media.

5. **Better Policing**
   - The enforcement of laws against underage alcohol consumption has led to a decrease in youth alcohol use.

6. **Non-drinking as a Social Norm**
   - Non-drinking is becoming increasingly accepted as a social norm, especially among young people.

7. **Socializing Needs**
   - Socializing no longer requires meeting in a pub or bar, and alternative social activities are more common.

**Why do young people choose not to drink?**

Young people choose not to drink for a variety of reasons. Some common reasons include:

- Financial pressures
- Social norms
- Achieving other goals
- Attitudes of parents
- Real life observations
- Concern about online image
- Better policing of underage sale of alcohol
- Non-drinking as a social norm
- Socializing needs
- Non-drinking as a positive choice

These reasons are often interrelated, and young people may choose not to drink for multiple reasons. Understanding these factors can help in developing effective strategies to support young people who choose not to drink.
How do we effectively support those teens who choose not to drink?

Herring et al (2014) "But no one told me it's okay to not drink": A qualitative study of young people who drink little or no alcohol. Journal of Substance Use 19, 95–102

A guiding principle of WHO’s Global Alcohol Strategy (2010):

Children, teenagers and adults who choose not to drink alcohol beverages have the right to be supported in their non-drinking behaviour and protected from pressures to drink.

- focus on teen 'binge drinking' reinforces belief that all young people do this
- important to 'redress the imbalance' - represent and promote diversity of young people choosing not to drink to help address existing stereotypes
- across all levels of policy making and areas of practice (health, education, etc) and within the family

How can parents support teens who choose not to drink?

Do not worry that they’re not going to ’fit in’ - it is possible to not drink and have a social life!

From an early age parents should

- acknowledge all types of drinking – “risky”, ’moderate’ and ’non-drinking’ – it is an option!
- if you know a non-drinker – talk about them
- discuss reasons people choose not to drink
- promote positive norms – most 15 year-olds classify themselves as non-drinkers, most don’t use illicit drugs
- challenge misconceptions and avoid generalizations - alcohol is a drug, ’not everyone does it’ and it is possible to celebrate without it, drugs aren’t ‘everywhere’
- be a positive role-model

What simple things can we do to be positive role models?

Parents - powerful influence, even on teens...

- don’t be frightened to talk about your alcohol use – how do you try to drink safely?
- limit your alcohol use, especially in front of your children
- provide food and non-alcoholic beverages if making alcohol available to guests
- organise events with families and friends that don’t involve alcohol
- don’t portray alcohol as a good way to deal with stress, e.g., “I’ve had a bad day, I need a drink!”
- sometimes decline the offer of alcohol

As someone who works with young people, what can you do?

How can workers ‘redress the imbalance’? Some simple tips that can make a difference and support non-drinkers:

- ensure conversations around alcohol begins with “if you choose to drink alcohol…” and not ”When you drink…”
- changing those few words can make so much difference
- non-drinkers feel included, validated and builds resilience
- promote positive norms
- even where teen drinking is the norm, let them know that non-drinking is an option
- avoid perpetuation of stereotypes and challenge misconceptions
- be mindful of language - don’t let inaccurate statements pass
- examine your school/agency/organisation’s practices around alcohol and drinking
- what is being communicated? Is non-drinking acknowledged?
For further information
or you are interested in more of what I have to say ...

For a PDF copy of this presentation or a list of references and supporting information, please go to my website - www.darta.net.au.

Please feel free to contact me by email - pdillon@darta.net.au or follow me on Facebook or Twitter (Drug and Alcohol Research and Training Australia) or go to my blogs – ‘Doing Drugs with Paul Dillon’ or ‘The Real Deal on Drugs’.

Doing Drugs with Paul Dillon

Teenagers, Alcohol, and Drugs

What your kids really want and need to know about alcohol and drugs

Paul Dillon