

School leavers' celebrations: Parents can make a difference

Information in this factsheet is based on surveys with people who went to *Leavers* at a popular Western Australian celebration site. 541 people were surveyed before and 402 after the celebrations. As heavier drinkers are more likely to go to events such as *Leavers*, the information below does not represent what the 'average' young person in Western Australia does.

Alcohol is the central issue

Alcohol was used by the clear majority of leavers, and mostly at risky levels, with more than half drinking at least 11 standard drinks a day.



The surveys found that 87% of drinkers were consuming at levels considered by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to put adults at risk of short term harm (more than 4 standard drinks in a single session).

87% of all surveyed leavers also reported at least one negative consequence that they attributed to alcohol or other drug use. For example, 58% reported a blackout, 41% an accident or injury, 21% had sex they later regretted, and 14% had unprotected sex.

Only a minority of leavers reported using illicit drugs, and most used them with alcohol. This combination of alcohol and other drugs was associated with a greater risk of a range of negative consequences such as having an emotional outburst, being physically aggressive, and sexual or legal problems.

Most young people estimated that they drank less than others. The heaviest drinkers may attract the most attention, but they don't necessarily represent the 'average leaver'.

Supplying your child with alcohol

Leavers who obtained alcohol from their parents were likely to drink at risky levels. Of the 25% of leavers who said their parents provided them with alcohol at the celebrations:

- 89% drank at levels considered risky for adults by the NHMRC.
- 65% reported they had sources other than their parents providing them with alcohol. Provision of alcohol by parents is likely to be topping up this situation.
- 45% spent more than \$100 on alcohol and other drugs at *Leavers*.

Talk about your expectations

Young people who perceived their parents would approve of them consuming more than 4 standard drinks in a single sitting reported heavier alcohol use. That is, more lenient parental attitudes and behaviours may contribute to riskier use.

Talk about ways to keep safe

The NHMRC guidelines recommend that it is safest for young people not to drink at all. The more a person drinks, the greater the risk. However, it is still important to talk about ways to reduce risk if your child chooses to drink. Young people drank less at *Leavers* if they had discussed strategies with their parents about how to keep safe while drinking. Potential strategies include: never leave a friend alone while intoxicated; drink water while drinking alcohol; and know where to seek help if needed. Some locations have organised activities - young people should be encouraged to participate in these as they often have support services where help can be sought.

Caffeine is also a drug

Remember, alcohol and caffeine are both drugs. Caffeine might be consumed in energy or soft drinks, coffee or pills. Leavers who used caffeine in combination with alcohol were at greater risk of reporting accidents or injuries, emotional outbursts, heated arguments and hangovers. Caffeine 'masks' the feeling of being drunk, and is associated with consumption of more alcohol, and greater risky behaviour.

Further information

Parents can access general drug and alcohol information at www.alcoholthinkagain.com.au or through the **Parent Drug Information Service** on **(08) 9442 5050** or **1800 653 203**. Tips for communicating with your child can be found in the booklet *Young People and Alcohol* available at www.communities.wa.gov.au/youth.

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