



"My name is
Katie and in 8
years I'll be an
alcoholic ...

**START THINKING
BEFORE THEY START DRINKING**

... by the time my parents
talk to me, alcohol won't
be my only problem"



MY NAME IS KATIE ...

The 'My Name is Katie' campaign aims to inform and advise parents of primary school children about the positive effects an early intervention can have on their child's later relationship with alcohol.

Knowing when to start talking to your child about alcohol can be tricky. Children's attitudes to alcohol change as they grow up, particularly during the transition from primary to secondary school, so it's a good idea to talk to them before the teen years and before their friends do.

The earlier you start the conversation the better, even if they seem too young. And once you've started, it's important to keep the conversation going. Giving your children the facts from an early age makes sure they have accurate information to understand or challenge what their friends tell them and make responsible drinking decisions when they are faced with them.

It is easier to prevent children from beginning to use alcohol than it is to intervene once patterns of behaviour are firmly established.

**TALK BEFORE THEY ARE TEENS
AND BEFORE THEIR FRIENDS DO**

YOU HAVE MORE INFLUENCE THAN YOU THINK

Sometimes it can seem like they don't listen to a word you say, but research shows parents have the most influence on young children's attitudes and behaviour towards alcohol.

80% of parents say they'll "deal with it when it happens" when it comes to talking to their child about alcohol. But it's best to talk about the risks associated with drinking before your child unknowingly puts themselves in a risky situation.

Although you might think school is the best place to learn about alcohol, alcohol education is not compulsory. So, while alcohol may be mentioned in science classes, children might not get as much information as you think. Finding out what your child has learnt about alcohol at school, and discussing it in more depth at home, can be a good way to start a conversation about drinking.

Children see and hear about alcohol from a very early age, whether at home, at school, from friends or in the media. Though you might be concerned about planting ideas about drinking in their heads, even if you talk to your children before their teen years, it's likely they'll already have their own thoughts about drinking. It's best to check their ideas are right, and encourage them to talk openly with you in the future to avoid making alcohol a taboo.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT ...

"Aged 16, I'll kick
someone so hard in the head
that they'll end up with
permanent brain damage.
I'll end up in a young
offenders centre ..."



DELAYING THE ONSET OF THEIR FIRST DRINK CAN SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THE LIFE-LONG HARM OF ALCOHOL

Children can make more responsible decisions about drinking if they have the facts to base them on and feel confident to say “no” if they want to. While the immediate effects of getting drunk at a young age may be no more than being sick or having a hangover, alcohol can leave children emotionally, physically and sexually vulnerable. So, the most important thing is to talk to your child early and often about the different risks associated with drinking alcohol.

Liver Damage

You might think that only life-long alcoholics get liver disease, but regularly drinking too much can increase a young person’s chances of damaging their liver. And, as there aren’t many warning signs of liver damage, a problem might only be discovered when it’s very serious.

Brain Development

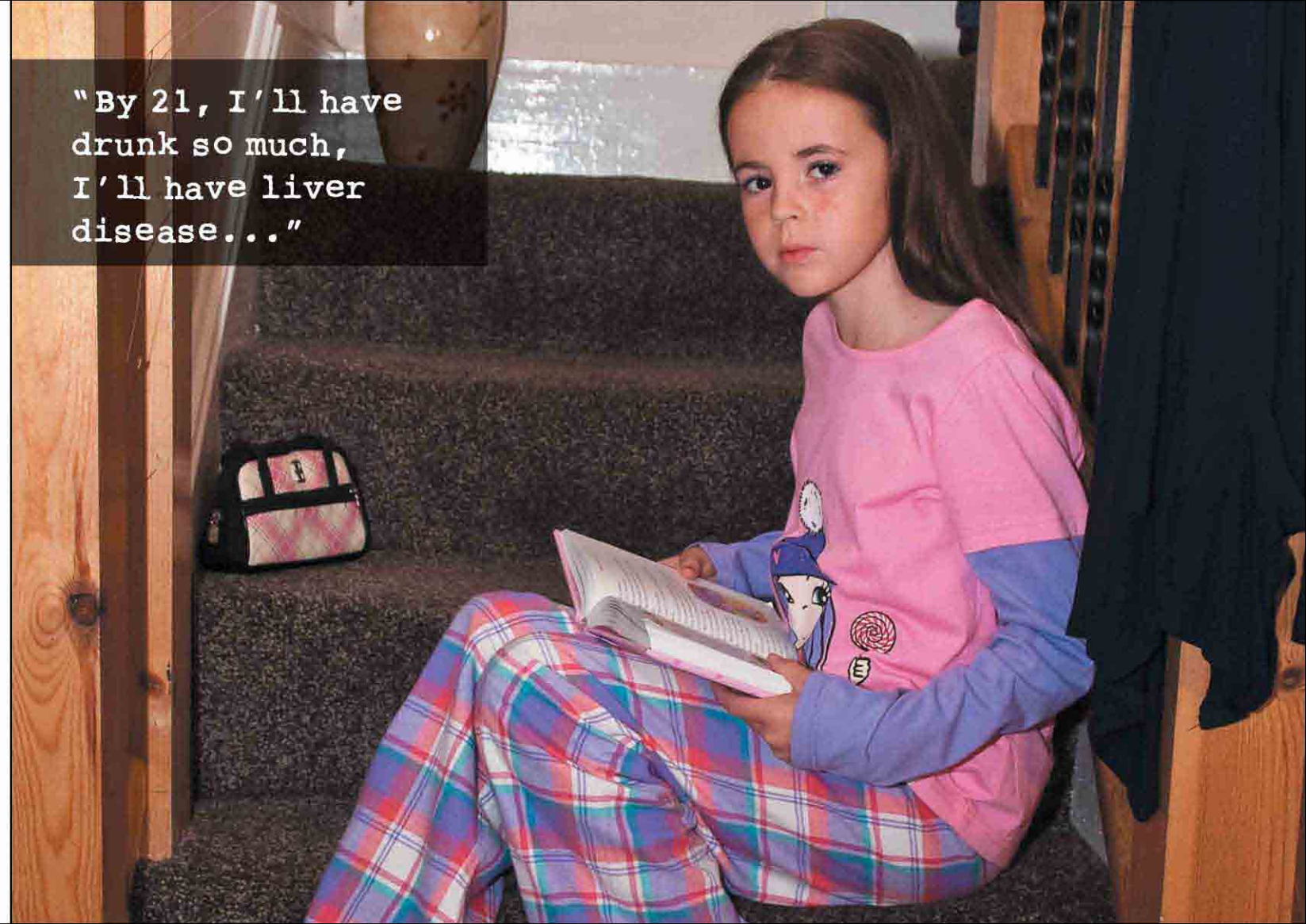
The areas of the brain responsible for behaviour, emotions, reasoning and judgement are still developing throughout childhood and into the teenage years. Drinking during this time can have a long-term impact on memory, reactions and attention span. This could affect their performance at school and stop them reaching their full potential.

Drinking Later In Life

If young people binge drink, they are more likely to be binge drinkers as adults. Drinking frequently at a young age is also linked to an increased risk of developing alcohol dependence in young adulthood. Regularly drinking in later life can lead to cancer, stroke, heart disease and infertility.

PARENTS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN DELAYING THEIR CHILD’S FIRST DRINK ...

“By 21, I’ll have
drunk so much,
I’ll have liver
disease...”



"I'll start stealing money from my parents to buy drink and drugs ..."



HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH FOR UNDER 18'S TO DRINK?

There's lots of debate about whether it's OK to let children have a small amount of alcohol to try - some people call this the continental approach. But there's no scientific evidence to prove this gives children a responsible attitude to drinking in later life.

Research shows the earlier a child starts drinking, the higher their chances of developing alcohol abuse or dependence in their teenage years and as an adult. Those who drink before age 15 are most vulnerable to alcohol misuse later in life.

It may be tempting to offer your child a sip of alcohol on special occasions so they don't feel left out. This could send mixed messages about whether they are or aren't allowed to drink. You might think that allowing them to try alcohol will demystify it. Instead, as with issues like smoking and drugs, it's better to let them know they can ask you anything, at any time, about alcohol. If you don't know the answer, be honest and suggest you find out together.

If you've already given your child a drink, it's best to be honest and explain that if they carry on drinking it could harm them so they aren't allowed to continue. Reassure them that, if they stop, any effects drinking has already on their body are likely to be reversible, but if you're worried it's best to talk to your GP.

**AN ALCOHOL-FREE CHILDHOOD IS
THE HEALTHIEST AND BEST OPTION**

CHILDREN ARE AWARE OF ALCOHOL FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE

Research shows that children as young as seven understand about alcohol and its effects. From this age, children can recognise drunkenness and addiction and can tell the difference between acceptable and unacceptable drinking behaviour. That's why it's important to start talking to them early about alcohol.

Children are naturally curious, so they'll probably ask you questions if they see you drinking and may ask you to try some. Rather than offering them a sip, use this as a chance to talk to them openly and honestly about the facts.

Young people are more likely to drink if they are exposed to parents or other family members drinking and if they have easy access to alcohol.

Parenting style is one of the most significant influences on whether children will go on to drink responsibly. Love and discipline are key factors in preventing your child developing an unhealthy relationship with alcohol.

A strong relationship with parents and carers is a powerful protective factor for children. Regular, open conversations about tough issues along with clear boundaries and expectations are key.

**YOU ARE THE MOST POWERFUL
INFLUENCE ON YOUR CHILDS LIFE**

"After a party I'll get into a fight, get stabbed and spend the next 8 weeks in intensive care ..."



RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOURS

Alcohol affects children's rational decision-making skills. When children drink, they feel more confident and have lower inhibitions. This can mean they make decisions which are out of character such as having unprotected sex.

Starting to drink before the age of 14 has been shown to be associated with a number of risk-taking behaviours including underage sexual activity, increased number of sexual partners and pregnancy.

The hormonal changes children go through at puberty make them more likely to take risks. Alcohol can further impair children's judgement, leaving them vulnerable. If they have been drinking, they might unintentionally put themselves in risky situations like getting involved in a fight, or walking home alone.

Let them know that if they are in trouble, feel uncomfortable or can't get home safely, they can call you at any time to arrange to collect them, no questions asked.

Young people who initiated alcohol use before the age of 13 reported greater involvement in violent behaviours. Early onset of drinking is significantly associated with unhealthy relationships, victimisation, suicidal tendencies and suicide attempts.

From a young age, children learn about acceptable behaviour by observing and copying their parents, so when it comes to drinking, it really is a case of leading by example.

What they see at home helps children think about how they'll drink alcohol as an adult. So, just as children learn to walk and talk like their parents, they learn how to drink like them too. For example, there's evidence that children whose parents drink moderately in front of them are less likely to drink to excess.

**PARENT'S
BEHAVIOUR HAS
A STRONG AND
DIRECT INFLUENCE
ON A CHILD'S
BEHAVIOUR...**

**IT REALLY IS
A CASE OF
LEADING BY
EXAMPLE**

"Before I turn 15, I'll be so drunk at a party, I'll have sex with a boy I don't know ..."



TIPS AND ADVICE

The age of your child's first drink is crucial, so it's important to talk to them before they have their first experience with alcohol.

They might start to take notice when people around them are drinking, for example at the dinner table or a family occasion like a wedding. They may ask simple questions such as, "What is that?" or "Why do you drink?"

Explain to them that alcohol is only for adults and that there is a sociable side to alcohol, but if you drink too much there can be bad consequences for your health and safety.

Children will become more curious about alcohol and may start to ask questions like:

What does it taste like?

What does alcohol do to you?

What does being drunk feel like?

If you're drunk, do you stay drunk forever?

This is a good time to talk about the impact of alcohol on the body. You could also explain how it feels to be drunk, for example, you might do silly things or feel sick. You might want to talk about the difference between drinking in moderation and abusing alcohol. Make sure they understand that different types of alcohol have different strengths.

Don't feel hypocritical for drinking when you have told them they can't. Instead, explain that alcohol is only for adults because their bodies have finished growing, and even adults have rules about how much they can drink.

If you do drink too much occasionally and have a hangover, don't try and hide the symptoms, instead talk openly to your child about how you're feeling, for example, having a headache or feeling sick and let them know the effects would be worse for them as they're smaller and still developing. This way, they know too much alcohol can have a negative consequence and you avoid making alcohol a taboo subject.

If an opportunity to talk to your child doesn't present itself, try using triggers to prompt discussion. These could include: At dinner while having a drink with your meal. Alcohol-related news stories, soap opera storylines, documentaries or anecdotal school stories. Asking what they have learnt about alcohol at school. If they've learnt about calories, you could draw the comparison between eating too much bad food and getting fat, and drinking too much and getting ill. After special occasions where people are drinking, like a wedding or birthday party. When you're unpacking the shopping or in the alcohol aisle of the supermarket.

Having a plan will make your life easier. Rather than waiting for something bad to happen, think about when and how you are going to start a conversation and keep it going.

Offering a listening ear is just as important as telling your child the facts. Reassure them that you will listen to their experiences and won't judge them if they have tried alcohol.

If you set rules about drinking, young people are less likely to get drunk, so it's important to work together to agree boundaries around alcohol. Agree on realistic consequences if they break the rules, and follow through if necessary.

If your child asks you a question about alcohol they're open to further discussion, so take the time to find out how much they already know and make sure they know the right facts.



**AS A PARENT,
THE WORST
THING YOU CAN
SAY ABOUT
DRINKING IS
NOTHING AT ALL**

"Please start
thinking before we
start drinking"

Confidential support and guidance available from:

Drinkaware

P: 020 7766 9900

E: contact@drinkaware.co.uk

W: www.drinkaware.co.uk/parents

Parenting NI

P: Freephone 0808 8010 722

W: www.parentingni.org

Your Local GP or Health Professionals

Supported by



**for the facts about alcohol
drinkaware.co.uk**

Models were used in this publication

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