

What research tells us about children and young people and alcohol

Children's future drinking behaviour can be influenced by seeing adults drink alcohol in the school setting. [Hammond & Dodd]

Direct harm that can result from schools supplying alcohol includes:

- hazardous drinking behaviour exhibited by parents and guests;
- consequential disruption of children's activities and events;
- physical assaults; and
- embarrassment or shame felt by children as a result of parental behaviour;
- sharp division within school communities [Munro et al, 2014]

Young people are particularly at risk of alcohol-related harm [Jernigan, 2001] and almost a quarter of New Zealand secondary-school students have reported recent binge drinking behaviour. [Clark et al, 2013]

Children can identify adult drinking behaviours from a very young age, and this influences not only what they anticipate the effects of drinking alcohol might be, but also what they understand as normal behaviour in their community. [Zucker et al, 1995][Zucker et al, 2008][Dalton et al, 2005]

If children associate positive effects with drinking alcohol they will start drinking both at an earlier age and more intensively. [Windle et al, 2008]

Early exposure to alcohol use by their parents and peers is a predictor of early alcohol uptake by children and adolescents [Zucker et al, 2008] which in turn increases their risk of later alcohol abuse and dependence. [Grant & Dawson, 1997][Zucker et al, 2008]

Alcohol intake in adolescence can adversely affect physical development, psychological wellbeing, interpersonal relationships and academic achievement, and increases the risk of injury and other adverse consequences associated with intoxication. [Faden & Goldman, 2005][Clark et al, 2013][Fergusson & Boden, 2011][Ministry of Transport, 2013][Connor & Casswell, 2012]

In addition, the treatment of adolescents with harmful drinking behaviour is problematic and overall not very successful. [Schroder et al, 2009][Brown et al, 2008]

It is for these reasons that national guidelines on alcohol consumption in both Australia and the United Kingdom recommend that people under the age of 18 should delay alcohol initiation as long as possible, and those under the age of 15 should not consume any alcohol at all. [Donaldson, 2009; NHMRC, 2009]

The section above has been informed by the report Hammond & Dodd (2014) Setting the Standard: Alcohol sales and promotion in New Zealand Schools. Public Health South, Southern District Health Board. This report is currently submitted for publication and the references it refers to are available on request.

Contacts

We are here to help. Please feel free to contact us with any questions you might have about your school alcohol policy.

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School Alcohol Policies

A guide for school communities



This guide provides information for developing an alcohol policy for your school or educational facility. Having a school alcohol policy means everyone is clear about use of alcohol on your premises or at school events.

Schools have an obligation to provide a safe environment for their students. Increasing access to and availability of alcohol is a key driver in increasing alcohol harm in our community. This guide gives you tips and pointers for developing your alcohol policy.

We recommend that your Board of Trustees works with staff, relevant school committees, and the parent teacher association (PTA), Home and School committees or equivalent to develop an alcohol policy for your school or facility. The policy should reflect the intentions of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012.

With thanks to Population Health, Hawkes Bay, and the South Island Public Health Partnership

Why have a school alcohol policy?

Educational facilities have an important role in our society. They are a core part of our community and social structure. Schools are required to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students. They are also required to comply fully with any legislation to ensure the safety of students and employees.

Although drinking alcohol is often seen as a normal part of social behaviour, normalisation has led to an acceptance in our society of excessive consumption. Alcohol consumption in the presence of children and young people further reinforces this. There is no evidence that "normalising" drinking - even with the best intentions of promoting more sensible drinking - reduces alcohol harm. Instead it offers greater exposure to alcohol by those most likely to be harmed by it.

The Ministry of Education suggests that schools have an alcohol policy. The Medical Officer of Health may oppose a school liquor licence application if it could inappropriately increase children's exposure to alcohol. If you apply for a liquor licence we will ask to see your alcohol policy.

Your school might like to consider being both smoke-free and alcohol-free, to create a special place in your community where children will feel safe, knowing that parents and caregivers will not be drinking or smoking.

Having a policy means everyone in the school community is clear about the place of alcohol in their school/educational facility.

The Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012

The object of the 2012 Act is that:

- the sale, supply, and consumption of alcohol should be undertaken safely and responsibly, and
- the harm caused by the excessive or inappropriate consumption of alcohol should be minimised.

"Harm" includes wider harm to the community. Among other things, the Act makes it an offence to supply alcohol to a minor (a person under 18) unless you are their parent or guardian or have the parent or guardian's express consent, and the alcohol is supplied in a responsible manner.

Points to consider

We recommend discussing these questions when you develop your policy:

- a) How can we ensure that our students, families and staff are safe at school and at school events?
- b) How does our school/educational setting contribute to reducing alcohol harm in our community?
- c) What example do we want to set for our children and community?
- d) Does having alcohol available on school premises or at school events have any benefit to our school community?
- e) Does it have any benefit to the children in our community?
- f) How can we support the intention of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012?



Suggested topics and prompts for your school alcohol policy

- **Purpose**
Promoting a healthy and safe environment for students, families and staff in relation to alcohol.
- **Use of alcohol by adults or staff when responsible for student welfare**
Is it clear that staff and other adults must not consume or be affected by alcohol while responsible for students?
- **Provision of alcohol to students**
Is it clear that staff members must not give alcohol to a student or enable a student to obtain alcohol?
- **Use of alcohol at staff social functions**
Is alcohol permitted at staff social functions at school? If alcohol is available, are non-alcoholic drinks, water and food also available? Are adults asked to drink sensibly and moderately? May students be present? Is alcohol served to or by students?
- **Use and sale of alcohol at school events**
Is alcohol permitted at school events when students are present? When students are not present? If alcohol is available, are non-alcoholic drinks, water and food also available? Are adults asked to drink sensibly and moderately? Is alcohol served to or by students?
- **Sale of alcohol at school for fundraising**
Does the school permit sale of take-home alcohol for fundraising? If yes, may students be involved in sales?
- **Alcohol as prizes at functions or in raffles**
Is it clear that alcohol may not be offered as prizes at functions or in raffles? (prohibited under the Gambling Act 2003)
- **Other school users**
Is sale or use of alcohol permitted when school premises are used by community groups?
- **Host responsibility**
If alcohol is provided and/or consumed, are the six key principles of host responsibility followed? (see 'Creating a Responsible Drinking Environment' at www.alcohol.org.nz).
- **Support for problem drinking**
Is there a clear pathway for intervention and support if alcohol use is causing problems for staff or students?
- **Other initiatives**
What else will you do to promote safe and healthy use of alcohol in the school community?
- **Responsibility for policy**
Who is responsible for your policy? How often will the policy be reviewed?