

Alcohol and Scouting



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Introduction

This factsheet looks at the issues that alcohol may raise in Scouting, both for adults and young people; and provides some facts and guidance.

Alcohol is a part of many people's lives regardless of whether they consume it. The issues alcohol raises are not just about the effect it has on health. Drinking alcohol can have associated hazards. The level of risk depends on who is drinking, how much and in what situation.

Drinking any amount of alcohol has effects on the physical co-ordination of the body and can seriously slow down judgement and reaction time.

Within minutes of being consumed, alcohol is absorbed into the blood and reaches the brain where there is an immediate impairment of brain function, even though the consumer is not aware of it. It takes an hour for the adult body to process one unit of alcohol.

Young people find out about alcohol by trying it themselves, observing others and through information from parents, at school and via the media, through advertising, etc.

As an adult in Scouting, you are a role model for young people. Young people are impressionable and will inevitably be influenced by those adults they respect. Drinking alcohol may not mean adults set a bad example to young people. However, in certain circumstances doing so has the potential to place adults in a compromising position with regard to their responsibilities for child protection and their duty of care.

The Scout Association's Safety Policy

The Scout Association has a key policy, which requires Scouting to be provided in a safe manner without risk to health, so far as is reasonably practicable. All adults need to be physically and mentally fit to undertake their responsibilities in this area.

When responsible for young people, adults must not drink alcohol. *Policy Organisation and Rules* 2.4 d

During 'off duty' periods, adults in Scouting also need to take into account the effects alcohol can have and how it may affect their fitness to fulfil their Scouting duties.

Under no circumstances should young people under the age of 18 be allowed to consume alcohol during Scouting events.

Good Practice

During Scouting events, which are attended by under 18 year olds, the following should apply:

- At any one time at least two adults, depending on the size and nature of the event, must not consume alcohol
- Any adults who do consume alcohol must not interact with young people and should be 'off duty'
- Adults should not consume alcohol in the presence of under 18 year olds
- Where possible adults should consume alcohol in an area not accessible to under 18 year olds

- Adults who do consume alcohol should behave in a responsible manner at all times
- Consideration should also be given to running alcohol free events and to the cultural and religious needs of those taking part
- Any member of the Scout Network and Scout Active Support should be expected to follow the same guidance as for adult Leaders.
- All young people and adults in the Group/Section should be aware of the standards expected of them
- Young people should be helped to understand the issues associated with alcohol and how to access information and advice.

Action Points

You may wish to discuss this factsheet with the rest of your leadership team. Items for discussion could include:

- How you will implement the guidance in this factsheet
- The arrangements you have in place for forthcoming events and activities
- How you will discuss issues concerning alcohol with young people.

Alcohol: the facts

Use the following to facilitate your leadership teams discussions on alcohol and to educate young people about the dangers.

- Between 15,000 and 22,000 deaths each year are associated with alcohol misuse, mainly resulting from stroke, cancer, liver disease, accidental injury or suicide (*NHS – summary of intelligence on alcohol*)
- Around 25% of children aged 11-15 drinks alcohol, and they drink an average of around

10 units per week (*NHS – summary of intelligence on alcohol*)

- 80% of crimes of disorder are alcohol related (*APS – Alcohol facts and figures*)
- 12% of 9-15 year olds drink alcohol (*APS – Alcohol facts and figures*)
- In 1999 there were an estimated 1.2 million incidents of alcohol related violence - approximately 23,000 per week (*Richardson, A. and Budd, T. 2003*)
- In 2001, more than a quarter (27%) of 11 to 16 year olds drank alcohol at least once a week compared to 23% in 2000. Drinking is more common in older adolescents with nearly a third of 15-16 year olds drinking at least once a week (*Alcohol Concern*)
- Young people drink mainly beer, cider, lager and wine. Consumption of alcopops has decreased since 1996 but young people are choosing stronger drinks such as white cider, strong brands of beer, fruit wines and vodka (*Alcohol Concern*)
- Statistics show that by the age of 13 young people who drink outnumber young people who don't drink (*Alcohol Concern*)
- Although young people may at times drink in an uncontrolled way, most will not go on to develop serious problems. Common problems young people experience are the effects of severe intoxication and accidents (*Alcohol Concern*).

Help and information

These facts are courtesy of the Institute of Alcohol Studies and Alcohol Concern. If you would like further information, please visit:

www.ias.org.uk

www.alcoholconcern.org.uk